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A CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE APOCALYPSE



ALEXANDRA SIMON-LÓPEZ
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A Critical Approach to the Apocalypse

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Edited by

Alexandra Simon-López and Heidi Yeandle

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Introduction. Apocalypse Now: 2013

Heidi Yeandle and Alexandra Simon-López

Why does the idea of the end of the world continue to be revisited, and why is this topic currently a cultural phenomenon? And how does the portrayal of apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic scenarios reflect contemporary society and prevalent fears about the state of our planet? These are some of the questions raised at the interdisciplinary *Apocalypse: Imagining the End* conference at Mansfield College, Oxford, 10-12 July 2013, the second global conference on this topic. This eBook constitutes a snap-shot of the discussions that took place at this three-day event.

While 2012 was the year that the Mayans' prophesised would be the end of the world, or the end of the world as we know it, 2013 was dominated by a fascination with the 'apocalypse.' Within popular culture, a succession of films were released in 2013 that imagine the Earth's pending destruction or depict a dystopian post-apocalyptic planet, portraying a world plagued by disease, destroyed by natural disasters or taken over by zombies, or where a lack of resources is threatening the survival of the human species. Films such as *World War Z*, *Elysium* and *After Earth* are just three examples. *World War Z*, directed by Marc Forster and based on a 2006 novel by Max Brooks entitled *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, stars Brad Pitt as the hero Gerry Lane who is faced with creating a vaccine to prevent a zombie apocalypse. Neill Blomkamp's *Elysium*, on the other hand, imagines a futuristic and overpopulated Earth in the year 2154, where the citizens have limited access to medical supplies and live in a state of poverty. The only hope is to travel to the eponymous space station where advanced healthcare and luxurious living conditions are available, but only to those who can afford the extortionate costs needed to evade the anti-immigration laws. Starring Will Smith and directed by M. Night Shyamalan, *After Earth* similarly depicts the destruction of Earth and the move to another safer planet, but focuses on the return to a hostile Earth a millennium after the natural disasters that caused the planet's ruin. Other films such as *This is the End*, directed by Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, and *The World's End*, the third instalment of the *Three Flavours Cornetto Trilogy*¹ directed by Edgar Wright and written by Wright and Simon Pegg, tackle the idea of the end of the world using comedy instead, respectively imagining a housewarming party and pub crawl that are compromised by apocalyptic crises.

Although film examples have been used above to illustrate the contemporary pre-occupation with mass destruction, this is not to say that other art forms or fields are not also discussing the notion of apocalypse. As the range of disciplines represented in this eBook demonstrate, the concept of the end of the world is by no means restricted to film. The chapters examine ideas of the apocalypse and examples of post-apocalyptic landscapes and communities in relation to literature, art, digital art, history, anthropology, religion, and climate change, as well as a

range of films and television series. Within this diverse discussion, there are a number of recurring trends. While ‘endings’ – in a variety of forms – are inevitably central to an analysis of an apocalypse, beginnings also feature prominently in the chapters that follow. There are repeated allusions to the idea of ‘change’ that an apocalypse poses or requires, and the notion of a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate that provides the foundations for a fresh start. Likewise, a number of chapters dwell on the original meaning of the term ‘apocalypse’ – a word derived from Greek meaning ‘revelation’ – and discuss what the modern notion of apocalypse as ‘the end’ uncovers, or reveals.

A discussion of the apocalypse presenting a social commentary, and embodying current concerns, is the most prevailing trend, however. This theme is voiced in relation to the motif of children being stolen in American Apocalyptic film, the economic crisis in Spain, as well as in relation to climate change, or ideas of the planet being overcrowded, to name just a few examples. Thus, this interdisciplinary text, like the conference, provides a broad discussion of the purpose of apocalyptic discourses in relation to contemporary concerns, and pinpoints a myriad of explanations as to why the depiction of an ‘apocalypse’ serves as a platform to examine prevailing cultural fears. The eBook is divided into nine parts, organised in relation to dominant themes or the disciplinary focus.

1. Tracing the Term ‘Apocalypse’

The opening section includes one chapter by Allan Weiss entitled ‘Ancient and Modern Apocalypse from a Genre Theory Perspective.’ This chapter provides a second, more detailed, introduction to the eBook as Weiss discusses the evolution of the ‘apocalypse’ genre, illuminating how changes in classification and the fluid borders of categories impact upon the definition and interpretation of ‘apocalypse.’

2. Zombies and the Apocalypse

The second part is dedicated to the ‘zombie’ theme and includes three contributions. Jeremy R. Strong’s chapter ‘Destruction from Within: The Significance of the Resurgence of Zombies in Film and Fiction’ discusses the multiple meanings of the figure of the zombie in contemporary society. He does this in relation to George A. Romero’s famous *Dead* series of films (1978-2009), as well as *World War Z* and the television series *The Walking Dead* (2010-2013).

Kelly Gardner focuses on ‘Zombie Survival Guides: Denying the Apocalypse’ by exploring the relationship between eschatological fiction and the zombie. She unveils how the presence of the zombie influences the aims and intentions of the apocalyptic vision while analysing Frank Kermode’s use of the rhetorical trope of peripeteia in *The Sense of an Ending* (2000).

Russell Ramey similarly examines the current significance of the zombie in his chapter ‘Board Up Your Windows, Lock Your Doors, No Help Is Coming: Zombies and Divine Violence,’ but in relation to the cultural critic and philosopher

Slavoj Žižek's text *Violence* (2008). He argues that zombies explain Walter Benjamin's concept of 'divine violence' that Žižek expands upon.

3. Apocalyptic Earth

Part Three deals with the apocalypse in relation to Earth and Weather. In a chapter entitled 'Lovelock's *Final Warning*: Towards a Typology of Religious Narration of Scientific Climate Change Accounts,' Seline Reinhardt discusses James Lovelock's *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* (2009) as a religious narrative on climate change. She argues that reading the text in this manner has implications for our perception of our finite environment.

Stephen Jackson is interested in the interplay between scientific projections about the impact of climate change and its disastrous consequences on the social world. In 'Weather of Mass Destruction: Forecasting the Future as Climate-Driven War,' he examines the change from climate forecasts to social forecasts and discusses how narratives on this topic change our perception of current social conflicts.

Hatice Yurttas considers the themes of global warming and Biblical apocalypse narratives in 'Myths of the End and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*.' She focuses on Winterson's depiction of the robotic character Spike in relation to 'her' subject position, and on the cyclical nature of Earth's history and climate.

4. Religious Notions of the Apocalypse

The fourth part is dedicated to religion and its impact on apocalyptic representations. Nick K. Crown's chapter 'Printed Representations of Catholic and Protestant Martyrdom in Tudor England, 1530-1600' draws upon Catholic and Anglican concepts of divine providence and the notion of an *elect*. His main research question concentrates on how this printed depiction has shaped the portrayal of catastrophes and natural disasters.

The importance of religious prophecies is also a major topic in Cynthia Finlayson's "'Apocalypse Now: The Roles of End-of-Days Prophecies in Islam from the Sublime Taj Mahal to Salafist Anarchy.'" The author critically engages in the *Qur'anic* descriptions of the apocalypse and how they have inspired Islamic art and architecture on the one hand, but engendered religious and military forces on the other.

Justin Michael James Dell's chapter 'Postmillennialism and the American Missionary Enterprise in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Nineteenth Century' focuses on the aggressive and audacious characters of American missionary work. He argues that the concept of postmillennialism can serve as an explanation as to why the Ottoman Empire, according to the American missionaries, had to be destroyed.

5. Literature and the Apocalypse

Part Five examines the depiction of the apocalypse in a range of literary texts. In 'The Apocalypse Is Here, Again: Moral Ambiguities and Human Failings in *Watchmen*,' Lara Narcisi provides a nuanced reading of Alan Moore's graphic novel (1987). She discusses the wide-ranging intertextuality that *Watchmen* demonstrates and highlights order in Moore's seemingly chaotic landscape.

Magdalena Zegarlińska discusses the final volume of *The Chronicles of Narnia* in her chapter 'The Eschatological Dimension of C. S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*.' She argues that in the final instalment of this series, Lewis recycles Biblical imagery from The Book of Revelation to teach his audience about morality, and to highlight that an 'apocalypse' is not strictly an end, but a beginning.

Elif Derya Şenduran compares British and Turkish notions of the apocalypse in relation to the First World War in her chapter 'Apocalyptic Images of the Great War in Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Peyami Safa's *Mahşer*.' Her discussion of Brittain and Safa draws out a shared perception of the apocalypse despite differences in the authors' experiences of the war.

6. The Apocalypse in Contemporary Film and Television

The sixth part deals with contemporary film and television, starting with Milo Sweedler's 'The End of the World of the End: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* and Political Theory.' Utilising the theories of Benjamin and Žižek as well as Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) and Hegel's theory of Universal History in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), he questions why von Trier depicts an annihilation of the planet as he does.

Shane Trayers examines another facet of apocalyptic film in her chapter 'The Stolen Child: Fear of Hybridisation and Metamorphosis in American Apocalyptic Film.' She discusses how contemporary American films and television series depict the fear of children being lost or stolen and returned as hybrids, focusing on the series *Falling Skies* (2011) as well as *Underworld: Awakening* (2012) and the *Resident Evil* films (2002-2012), amongst others.

Igor Grbić's chapter '*Apocalypse Now* and the *Bhagavata Purana*: the End of the World as We Hardly Know It' offers a detailed comparison of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* and the epic compendia of ancient India, the *Puranas*. He argues that the *Puranas* provide an alternative way of reading the film.

In their chapter 'Crime and Punishment: Greed, Pride and Guilt in *Breaking Bad*,' Pablo Echart and Alberto N. García analyse one of the most critically acclaimed American drama series of the last decade. They unveil the moral and narrative mechanisms that can be held responsible for the main character's self-destruction.

Edisa Mondelo González, Alfonso Cuadrado Alvarado and Rubén Sánchez Trigos highlight the crisis of parliamentary monarchy in their chapter '*Black*

Mirror: “The National Anthem”. An Artistical Creation for an Institutional Crisis.’ They show how cinematographic aspects, such as the depiction of an apocalyptic landscape, mirror the socio-political crisis which can be considered a symbolic apocalypse.

7. Apocalypse and Material Crises

Part Seven concentrates on the apocalypse as a crisis, focusing on the place of the ‘home’ as well as financial crises experienced by individuals, families, and countries. In their chapter ‘Filming the Domestic Apocalypse: Home and Hell in Narratives of the Crisis,’ Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla and Silvia Herreros de Tejada identify the stages that the idea of ‘home’ undergoes in apocalyptic films, using John Ford’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946) as their two main examples.

Raúl Álvarez Gómez and Araceli Rodríguez Mateos discuss the relationship between film and reality in ‘Apocalyptic Landscapes in Times of Crisis: Aesthetic Connections Between Fiction Cinema and Documentary Images Based on Reality.’ They highlight similarities between the depiction of the apocalypse in Spanish films and news coverage of the economic crisis in Spain, focusing mainly on the 2008 release *3 Días*, directed by F. Javier Gutiérrez, *Fin* (2012) – directed by Jorge Torregrossa, and Álex and David Pastor’s *Los Últimos Días* (2012).

Marta Frago’s ‘Facing the Global Financial Crisis and the Great Recession: The Biopic as a Socio-Cultural Response to the Collapse’ concentrates on the different types of biopics in mainstream cinema from 2008-2012. A special focus is placed upon political biopics, including kings and social leaders.

8. Apocalyptic Art

The eighth part is dedicated to art. Alexandra Simon-López discusses the portrayal of the apocalypse in digital art in relation to gender and sexuality in her chapter ‘Sex and Seduction at the End of Time: The Apocalypse in Digital Art.’ She compares male and female digital artists in relation to their depiction of gender and sexuality in cybersurrealist art in line with the wider fascination with the apocalypse in contemporary society.

Helen Sutherland’s chapter ‘John Martin’s Marketing of a Modern Apocalypse’ examines Martin’s art in relation to the apocalyptic sublime *vis-à-vis* Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry on the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). She discusses Martin’s work – more specifically the marketing of his art – in the context of the nineteenth-century idea of the apocalypse.

9. After the Apocalypse

The ninth and final part deals with what happens post-apocalypse. In his chapter ‘(Post)Apocalypse Now! David Mitchell’s Postmodern Fiction,’ Scott Dimovitz demonstrates how Mitchell’s works present eschatological parables and

illustrates that the apocalypse can be perceived as a metaphorical Fall. He analyses Mitchell's novels by unveiling their inherent prophetic postmodern allegories.

Heidi Yeandle analyses Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* with reference to Carter's definition of 'speculative fiction.' In her chapter 'Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains*: The Post-Apocalyptic Function of the University,' she argues that Carter intends to provide an answer to questions regarding post-apocalyptic survival by comparing applicable survival skills with scholarly knowledge in Carter's novel.

The final chapter by Sheila C. Bibb – 'Post-Apocalyptic Identity: Alderney in the Spotlight' – illustrates the challenges that Alderney's population had to take on after the German Occupation during the Second World War. She discusses the positive and negative aspects in the aftermath of war, and how an apocalyptic disaster, such as World War Two, can trigger the strength to rebuild and regrow.

Notes

¹ The first two instalments in this trilogy are *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Hot Fuzz* (2007).

Filmography

Blomkamp, Neill. *Elysium*. Directed by Neill Blomkamp. Culver City, CA: TriStar Pictures, 2013.

Carnahan, Matthew Michael, Drew Goddard, and Damon Lindelof. *World War Z*. Directed by Marc Forster. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2013. DVD.

Rogen, Seth, and Evan Goldberg. *This is the End*. Directed by Seth Rogen, and Evan Goldberg. Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2013. DVD.

Whitta, Gary, and M. Night Shyamalan. *After Earth*. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan. Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2013. DVD.

Wright, Edgar, and Simon Pegg. *The World's End*. Directed by Edgar Wright. Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2013. DVD.

Part 1

Tracing the Term ‘Apocalypse’

Ancient and Modern Apocalypse from a Genre Theory Perspective

Allan Weiss

Abstract

The term ‘apocalypse’ is currently understood to mean mass destruction, the end of the human race or the planet as a whole, or at least some sort of global disaster. As we know, however, the word literally means ‘revelation,’ and it was used as the title of the text that eventually became the final book of the Bible. Yet for most scholars who specialise in apocalyptic studies, an apocalyptic text must include an eschatological element. Nowadays, the term ‘apocalyptic science fiction’ refers to fantastic literature about the destruction of humanity, however that end comes about. How, then, did the Greek word for ‘revelation’ come to mean something far more limited: a revelation of the end-times? In other words, how did the eschatological element become a defining feature of a genre in which it may well have played only an incidental role when the genre was established? To understand this development, we might turn to recent genre theory, and particularly to the literary application of psychological theories on taxonomy. One such theory involves the role of the prototype: the instance or example of a type that becomes the model by which we categorise other phenomena as belonging to the same type. It may well be, then, that while in St. John’s day, an ‘apocalypse’ could be any sort of revelatory text, Revelation itself – through its canonisation – became the prototypical apocalyptic text, one that forever changed the genre by making eschatology a necessary feature of a ‘true’ apocalypse.

Key Words: Apocalypse, genre, biblical literature, science fiction.

As you all know, the word ‘apocalypse’ came to English via ancient Greek; it literally means ‘unveiling’ or ‘revelation’ and was the original title of the text that would later become the last book of the New Testament. Today, however, the term is conventionally understood to mean mass destruction, the end of the human race or the planet as a whole, or at least some sort of global disaster. In fact, we usually refer to a text about the end of the world as ‘apocalyptic’ even when – as is almost always the case – there is no ‘revelation’ of any sort involved. It appears, then, that the genre of apocalyptic literature (to cite just one form of apocalyptic art) has evolved to the point where its name no longer matches its defining element. How, then, did the Greek word for ‘revelation’ come to mean something far more limited and even potentially contradictory? To understand this development, we might turn to recent genre theory, and particularly to the literary application of psychological theories on classification.

The history of genre theory in the West is a long one, and we can trace its roots at least as far back as Plato, who discusses the different types of poetry or song (which then were synonymous) in Book III of the *Republic*. It should be noted that he treats poetry as a subset of rhetoric, and distinguishes the types of poetry not simply by form and content – the different measures employed and subjects treated – but also by what effects the genres have on their audience. It is therefore not true that he seeks to eliminate poetry entirely from his ideal society, but only wants to limit which genres are permitted and in which circumstances. The best-known work of ancient genre criticism is Aristotle's *Poetics*, although Aristotle is dealing with only one genre: tragedy. Both Plato and Aristotle are being descriptive rather than prescriptive in their accounts, contrary to what some of their critics have said, and they both argue that literature can be divided into various types depending on form (for instance, whether there is metre and what sort) and manner of presentation. As for manner of presentation, they agree that there are three main types: narrative, dramatic, and mixed.

The notion of a generic triad persisted into the medieval and Renaissance worlds despite the fact that neither Plato nor Aristotle insisted there were only three ways to distinguish texts, or that mode of presentation (who speaks, whether the narrator or character him/herself) was the only feature to consider. At some point during the Renaissance, the 'mixed' genre was replaced with the 'lyric,' and the modern triad of narrative, dramatic, and lyric became so influential that it has affected German and French genre scholarship down to very recent times (see, for example, Yves Stalloni's 1997 study).¹

After the rise of prescriptive genre theories during the Neo-Classical period, the whole notion of genre fell into disrepute during Romantic times, with authors and theorists denying that genre did or should have a role to play in 'true' creativity. There arose the notion that adherence to genre norms – or conventions – was antithetical to poetry, although of course a belief in genre's limiting and even stifling nature is still a recognition of its existence and power. Some, like Benedetto Croce, deny that genre even exists, at least for the creative mind, seeing it as only a critical imposition on poetry after the fact.²

Modern genre theory can be traced to the evolutionary literary theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Ferdinand Brunetiere and Ernest Bovet.³ Their biology-based views have been somewhat distorted by later scholars, who accused these Darwinian thinkers of trying to pigeonhole literary genres in systems of strict classification. But of course Darwin's whole point in his challenge to Linnaean taxonomy was to argue for the changeable nature of species; similarly, evolutionary genre theorists sought ways to account for changes in literature in social and cultural evolution. Their interest was far more diachronic than synchronic.

We do not have time to trace the various developments in genre theory through the twentieth century and beyond; what we can do is summarise some of the most

widely accepted points raised by Russian Formalists like Yuri Tynyanov, structuralists like Tzvetan Todorov and Mikhail Bakhtin, and recent theorists like Alastair Fowler, John Frow, Heather Dubrow, Paul Hernadi, and Ralph Cohen, to name only a few.⁴ In addition, we need to discuss some more fundamental questions about how human beings classify what they encounter in the world, for, despite the occasional claims by genre theorists that what they are doing does not involve classification, any generic analysis involves some sort of taxonomy. Poems and science-fiction novels are not the same thing, and seeing the difference between them is classificatory whether the scholar acknowledges the fact or not.

First, genres can be defined by a number of features; no one feature, such as mode of presentation or form, is universally defining. Some, like the sonnet, are distinguished by form; others, like science fiction, are defined by content – theme, setting, characters, and so on; still others, like horror or comedy, are defined by function, that is, the purpose and/or desired effect on the audience. It is of course difficult to separate these features, but there is no question that some genres are more clearly identified by one or the other.

Second, genres are seldom if ever ‘pure;’ in other words, elements of various genres combine in any given text – see, for example, Mikhail Bakhtin’s view of the novel as ‘dialogic’ – and genre boundaries are not clear-cut but, to use a commonly used descriptor, ‘fuzzy.’⁵ In his study of fantasy, for example, Brian Attebery uses the term ‘fuzzy sets’ to describe fantasy and its subgenres.⁶ There are texts in most, if not all, genres that are widely regarded as unquestionable members of those genres, while others are seen as on the fringes. The diversity of texts assigned to any given genre category has led to controversy over how such categories can be understood, a point to which we will return. Furthermore, genres are often seen as combinations of features rather than as defined by one or another; a genre is therefore a system, and it exists relationally in a cultural system with other genres. While some have tried to define genre as a single level of abstraction, particularly in Bible studies, in fact genre exists at nearly every level of abstraction and is relational in that genres are definable relative to other genres at the same level of abstraction.

Third, genres are seldom if ever static; they change in accordance with cultural and material developments, and as many have pointed out (most notably Gerard Genette and Todorov)⁷ every new text adds to and even subtly modifies the genre. Most scholars in the field agree that genres exhibit both synchronic and diachronic features, although different theorists tend to stress one element or the other. The point is that understanding a genre requires attention to both its continuities and its changes. Furthermore, it is not merely the set or combination of features of a particular genre that changes, but even generic labels can go through radical alterations. For example, the term ‘romance’ when referring to fiction has very different meanings for nineteenth-century and contemporary readers. In *Rereading Allegory* (1995), Deborah Madsen discusses the variable nature of genre names,

noting that numerous factors, including a genre's reputation and place in the overall literary system, can affect what a genre is called.⁸

On the other hand, some scholars have seen the fluid nature of genre as evidence that no genre can be truly defined – that, in fact, there are no definite boundaries and therefore it is futile to discuss genre beyond a recognition of its dynamic nature. Such a perspective denies the historical nature of genre and in particular one of genre's most important elements: the presence and role of conventions. Conventions – everything from formal and structural features to the presence of certain settings and character types – are the building blocks of genres; they are the code through which genres communicate, offering a kind of generative language for authors and heuristic guide for readers in the rhetoric of fiction, to use Wayne Booth's term.

In fact, recent genre theorists have returned to the position of seeing literature as one form of discourse among many, and view its features and effects as rhetorical elements. Deriving in part from speech-act theory, as outlined by J. L. Austin and John R. Searle, current rhetorical approaches analyse genre conventions as constituting the implicatures or frames of literary discourse, the sort of unspoken assumptions and contexts that make specific literary texts comprehensible.⁹ Also, far from seeing genre as a purely literary phenomenon, recent researchers see genre as inhering in every facet of human communication, and their insights into non-literary communication have profound implications for how literature is both composed and received (see, for example, the work of J. R. Martin, Richard Coe, Aviva Freedman, Peter Medway, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson).¹⁰

Any study of genre must wrestle with the problem of understanding why and how we categorise. For most theorists, the issue lies in whether genre should be seen as primarily authorial and rhetorical – the author chooses the genre and its conventions in order to communicate something to his or her audience – or heuristic: the idea that genre distinctions are analytical categories derived by readers and critics in order to facilitate the understanding of texts. (The assumption by some book-buyers that genres are purely commercial distinctions can be dismissed out of hand, given how long the study of genre has been around; concepts of genre long predate the book industry.) That we do categorise is undeniable, and the way we classify texts has led scholars to offer two possible explanations for the way we distinguish genres.

The first approach is based on Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' (32). It has been argued that genre theorists who base their views of generic similarities on Wittgenstein's language philosophy are misreading him (see Fishelov's article, for example); nevertheless, the notion has proven to be quite compelling for scholars studying what unites texts in a genre.¹¹ The idea is that while text B may resemble text A in some way, and text C may resemble text B, it does not necessarily follow that texts A and C are alike. What genre theorists who

depend on Wittgenstein seek is a paradigm that accounts for the ‘fuzziness’ of genre boundaries. The problem, however, is that they stress the diversity of any given genre at the expense of what makes its members a ‘family.’ As Fishelov points out, despite their evident differences, family members share genetic roots and similarities; at the end of the day, something must unite the members of a genre, however general that common feature may be.¹²

The other approach to classification involves prototypes: individuals or a group of similar individuals become accepted as prototypical members of a class, and we see others as being more or less like them. Anything with strong similarities to the prototype is seen as clearly a member of that class, while members with few similarities are seen as marginal examples. Needless to say, much depends on such arbitrary factors as the education of classifiers; if young children, for example, are shown pictures of robins as representing birds, they will forever see robin-like birds as prototypical, while animals with equal claim to bird status that look nothing like robins, such as ostriches, will be considered marginal. Eleanor Rosch’s research on categorisation favours the prototypical view, although her psychological studies have to some extent been inconclusive.¹³ Yet her insights offer intriguing possibilities for understanding how genre is defined and perpetuated. It may be that genres are defined by members that are, for one reason or another, considered prototypical; unquestioned members of the genre are those that are most similar to the prototypical one or ones, while marginal examples are those seen as less similar.

We know that literature is a social phenomenon – what we define as literature, and as its genres, depends on social determinants like education and class. Literary genres are social facts in John Searle’s terms, and thus subject to social (non-literary as well as literary) influences and even determinants, including some quite arbitrary factors.¹⁴ Genres can be born, survive, and die depending on changes in aesthetic taste, technology, the marketplace, and the innovations of individual authors.

Thus, a genre like the apocalypse can be affected in profound ways by developments that have little to do with the authors of such texts. If it is true that a genre is often identified by its prototypical examples, with later texts – and even earlier ones – classified according to their similarities to or differences from such prototypes, can such an approach help us understand the radical changes that the apocalypse has undergone from ancient to modern times?

During the 1970s, the Society for Biblical Literature established an Apocalypse Group to come up with a definition of the genre of ‘apocalypse’ that could be generally accepted and used by future scholars in the field. Led by John J. Collins, the Group established a list of features that would be more or less defining elements of the genre, and they published the results of their work in a special issue of the theological journal *Semeia*: “‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly

being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.’¹⁵ The Group’s assumption, then, is that an apocalypse must contain an eschatological theme. Collins correctly points out that one should not be fooled by the title of a text; just because the author calls his/her text an ‘apocalypse’ does not mean that it is one: ‘the title is not a reliable guide to the genre.’¹⁶ On the other hand, Collins is endeavouring to establish the boundaries of a genre whose defining features are still open to question, and therefore risks engaging in circular argumentation.

As one might expect, other scholars criticised the definition, particularly over the fact that it deals with form and content but neglects function. To address these concerns, the Group slightly revised the definition and published the new version in a later issue of *Semeia*; the new definition adds a line about the theological function of apocalypses, saying that an apocalypse is ‘intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behaviour of the audience by means of divine authority.’¹⁷ More strikingly, one critic, David E. Aune, objected to the requirement that an apocalyptic text have an eschatological message; in his article in *Semeia* 36, he cites Paul D. Hanson’s distinction between the terms ‘apocalypse,’ ‘apocalypticism,’ and ‘apocalyptic eschatology,’ and says, ‘The central concern of the writers of apocalypses was not apocalyptic eschatology so much as speculative knowledge generally, in which cosmology figured prominently.’¹⁸ In her introduction to the issue, Adela Yarbro Collins responds on behalf of the Group to Aune’s preference for a broader definition by saying, ‘It seems that eschatological content is the primary distinguishing mark of apocalypses over against other revelatory texts which are very similar in form.’¹⁹

The most serious challenge to the definition, and indeed to conventional views of what constitutes an ‘apocalypse,’ came from Christopher Rowland, whose *The Open Heaven* (1982) argues that in ancient apocalyptic literature, an eschatological vision was not a necessary part of the genre.²⁰ Rowland stresses the literal meaning of the word, saying that an apocalyptic text need only portray a divine revelation of some sort, not necessarily one involving the end-times: ‘An apocalypse which shows little or no interest in eschatology is no less an example of apocalyptic because of this deficiency.’²¹ Rowland’s study, and in particular his thesis, could not be ignored, yet even after the publication of his book, the vast majority of scholars have continued to treat apocalyptic as nearly synonymous with eschatological. They still take for granted that an apocalypse must be concerned with final things, even though the genre’s label clearly denotes revelation, not eschatology.

Rowland’s definition – the idea that an apocalypse need not be about the end of the world – may seem bizarre to us, even though he makes a strong case that the ancient writers of the Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition defined the genre in

which they wrote much differently from how we see it. How, then, did eschatology become considered a defining feature of the apocalypse? Bible history and Rosch's prototype theory of classification may provide an answer.

One of the questions with which Bible scholars have struggled is why the Book of Revelation was included in the New Testament. Many other apocalyptic texts, both Jewish and Christian, were written during the period from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D., yet only two were permitted entry into the biblical canon: Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New. Many have argued that apocalyptic thought was seen in both religions as dangerously anti-establishment, especially as the Christian Church became more centralised and institutionalised. For a religion that sought to invest authority in its priesthood, the notion of individuals enjoying divine visions without clerical involvement was perhaps anathema to Christianity's early leaders. Yet while other Christian apocalypses were kept out of the Christian Bible, Revelation made it in. We know that the early Church Fathers mistakenly believed that the John who wrote Revelation was the same one who wrote the Gospel, and therefore they may have believed that the book was authoritative by virtue of its authorship, despite its generic shortcomings.

Revelation's canonisation might thus have been in a sense accidental, yet the results of that accident have been profound. Revelation became for many the prototypical apocalyptic text precisely because of its presence as the only apocalypse in the Christian scriptures (apart from the 'Little Apocalypse' in Mark). We can speculate, then, that later writers and thinkers saw an eschatological vision as essential to the apocalypse because the only canonical apocalypse offered one. Consequently, when the Apocalypse Group sought to define the genre, it read its assumption about the centrality of eschatology back into the genre; in effect, it engaged in the genre-theory version of the hermeneutic circle and produced a circular argument. Collins and others rejected texts without a vision of the end-times as not true apocalypses, then defined the genre on the basis of only those texts that offered such visions.

Later, when the apocalypse was secularised by writers of science fiction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the eschatological element (if we can call it that) remained while the visionary one – particularly the divine source of that vision – faded from the genre.²² Ironically, then, what may have been the defining feature of ancient apocalypse, the revelation of transcendent mysteries and divine truths, gave way to a very different defining feature, the end of everything. The term 'apocalypse' shifted radically in meaning: from revelation without (necessarily) the end of the world in ancient times to the end of the world without (necessarily) revelation today. Social factors, including the somewhat arbitrary canonisation of Revelation, caused the generic label of apocalypse to undergo such a profound change that it now means almost the opposite of what it originally did.

Notes

¹ Yves Stalloni, *Les Genres Littéraires* (Paris: Dunod, 1997).

² Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* trans. Douglas Ainslie (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1995).

³ Ernest Bovet, *Lyrisme, Épopée, Drame: Une Loi de L'histoire Littéraire Expliquée par L'évolution Générale* (Paris: Colin, 1911); Ferdinand Brunetière, *L'évolution des Genres dans L'histoire de la Littérature: Leçons Professées a L'école Normale Supérieure. Tome I* (Paris: Hachette, 1892).

⁴ E.g., Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982); Alistair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Paul Hernadi, *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁶ Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

⁷ Gerard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁸ Deborah Madsen, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1995), 12.

⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹⁰ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, eds., *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action* (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association, n.d.); Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard and Tatiana Teslenko, eds., *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2002); Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, eds., *Genre and the New Rhetoric* (London: Taylor, 1994).

¹¹ David Fishelov, 'Genre Theory and Family Resemblance: Revisited', *Poetics* 20, No. 2 (1991): 123-138.

¹² Ibid., 124-125.

¹³ Eleanor Rosch, 'Principles of Categorization', *Cognition and Categorization*, eds. Eleanor Rosch and Barbara B. Lloyd (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1978), 27-48.

¹⁴ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

¹⁵ John J. Collins, 'Introduction: Toward a Morphology of a Genre', in 'Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre', ed. John J. Collins, Special Issue, *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.

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- ¹⁶ Ibid., 2.
- ¹⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, Introduction to 'Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting', Special Issue, *Semeia* 36 (1986): 7.
- ¹⁸ David E. Aune, 'The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre', *Semeia* 36 (1986): 67.
- ¹⁹ Collins, Introduction, 5.
- ²⁰ Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 26-28.
- ²¹ Ibid., 28.
- ²² For a history of apocalyptic science fiction, see W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); cf. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

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Part 2

Zombies and the Apocalypse

Destruction from Within: The Significance of the Resurgence of Zombies in Film and Fiction

Jeremy R. Strong

Abstract

Zombies have entered the realm of international politics via the Occupy protest movement. Tavia Nyong'o detailed in his article 'The Scene of Occupation' the march of protesters dressed as zombies, to the Bank of England, in London, on 31 October 2011. The entrance of the zombie body onto the international political scene stems from a process of trial and validation that has been circulating itself at the national level for years. Just a few recent examples include: zombies showing up to protest a shady mining deal with an art gallery in Brisbane, Australia; zombies lurching into action against a Baptist anti-gay movement in Washington; and student zombies un-livid about exorbitant transit fees in Ottawa. What better to occupy space in support of a cause than a living body? I will show why it might be an undead one. Recent post-apocalyptic fiction, and the large mainstream appetite for it, demonstrate where the threat to the existence of humanity truly lies: within. In Max Brooks' 2006 novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, the zombie infection spreads through selfishness, greed and ignorance. In Chapter Two, a human smuggler explains that in the early days of the zombie infection, he 'made a lot of people rich: border guards, bureaucrats, police, even the mayor.'¹ In a later chapter, Grover Carlson admits that assistance was denied to infected citizens living in certain economic regions: 'In politics, you focus on the needs of your power base. Keep them happy, and they keep you in office.'² In these and other instances, *World War Z* criticises our current social order. By examining this novel as well as others by David Moody and Mira Grant, along with select references to *The Walking Dead* and zombie films, my chapter demonstrates the role the zombie narrative plays, both politically and psychologically, in affecting social change or in revealing desire for such change.

Key Words: Kristeva, abject, Halberstam, Romero, protest, capitalism, revolution, environmentalism, climate, globalisation.

1. Cannibalistic Meaning Machines

Film director George A. Romero garnered international attention with his 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* and also with the five sequels that make up the rest of his *Dead* series (1978-2009). Romero is the person most easily identified with the current popularity of the zombie in modern culture. During an interview with Noel Murray, Romero was questioned about the construction of the zombie and said:

The point is, it's become this new sort of monster, and it's idiomatic. I expect a zombie to show up on *Sesame Street* soon, teaching kids to count. And you can sorta glue onto it anything you want to talk about. Unfortunately, people don't seem to be using it as metaphor as much as they could.³

As colloquially as the filmmaker phrases the current representative power and state of the zombie today, Romero identifies the simple truth. He also points out that it is not his job to tell us what the zombie represents; he more or less just makes the movies he wants to.⁴ Though a small handful of academics attempted to engage with the zombie in the 1970s and 80s, the subject seems to have lost steam for most of the 90s. After the start of the new millennium, however, and the world-altering events of 9/11, the zombie suddenly began to resurface to wide cultural popularity, which we may or may not be currently experiencing the apex of. Seemingly inspired by AMC's successful series *The Walking Dead* (2010-2013), scholarship engaging with the zombie has recently undergone an explosion of interest. Some of the most stimulating work being done in critical race theory, gender studies, social-cultural anthropology, science fiction studies, psychology, philosophy and other peripheral disciplines has increasingly been focused on bodies, visibility, representation and biopolitics. The zombie manages to shuffle into all of these discourses, unmindful of traditionally established borders.

Gerry Canavan recently wrote that zombies:

arise not from *without* but from *within*: not externally as a threat to power but internally as the truth of it. The *homo sacer* of the zombie, simultaneously included within and excluded from the body of the state, exists at the site of biopower's limit and in this sense beyond the control of either state or market.⁵

This chapter engages with the idea that zombies do not simply exist in Canavan's sense at the borders of biopower but that they instead represent the final breakdown or destruction of those and other borders. In this sense zombies are the ultimate post-apocalyptic bodies, as they are continually ending civilisation; they are the never-ending apocalypse.⁶ Canavan's identification of zombies as border breakers seems a logical extension of Giorgio Agamben's concept of 'homo sacer': a critical framework that grapples with the very nature of law formation and implementation as well as with the nature of how biopower is created. Using this framework, I see the zombie as an undead being that is 'outside both human and divine law'⁷; however, zombies also fall under Judith Halberstam's revised definition of the Gothic and are therefore the ultimate 'meaning machines.'⁸ The zombie narrative is as metaphorically cannibalistic as it is literal and therefore 'an essentially consumptive genre which feeds parasitically upon other literary texts.'⁹

When examining these narratives I follow Halberstam's lead while loosening the definition of a text to include films and television series.¹⁰

2. Priming Culture: Abject and Borderless Bodies

The social relevance of the zombie has significantly increased in recent years as humanity's understanding of the destructive power of bodies has been altered. The concept of Individual responsibility for environmental damage has been enhanced through the idea of the carbon footprint while media focus on the tactics of terrorism has begun to dissolve the boundary between human and bomb.¹¹ A rebirth of protest movements, enhanced by social media, has at least given the appearance that bodies are powerful entities.¹² The success and international mobility of the Occupy movement in particular demonstrates a large proportion of public support for social action. Most importantly, the zombie has been symbolically adopted by collectives such as Occupy, and so represents a tangible threat to power structures.

The use of the zombie as a symbol of political protest is not in itself as surprising as the reasons we may be drawn to its representative power. Those reasons seem best revealed by applying Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, in which she identifies the ability of the abject to draw the individual 'toward the place where meaning collapses.'¹³ But as Kristeva claims, the abject is also the primer of culture and the place where as individuals we are 'at the border of [our] condition as [living beings].'¹⁴ She identifies the corpse as the most powerful example of the abject, though clarifies that this is not due to 'lack of cleanliness or health' but rather to the ways in which abjection 'disturbs identity, system [and] order. What does not respect borders, positions [and] rules.'¹⁵ The zombie narrative fascinates us and holds us captive because individually we desire to understand those rules, borders, systems and orders that construct not only various human social groups but also civilisation generally. The best way to understand those component parts is to dismantle and consume them just as the zombie does to the human body.

3. Zombie Film and Television: Gothic Technologies of Projection

In George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which still holds firm as the standard zombie narrative against which all popular modern zombie film and fiction is set, the protagonists who are isolated in the farmhouse first struggle to understand the living dead before being destroyed by them.¹⁶ In Kristeva's sense of abjection, this is the way in which the abject 'simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject.'¹⁷ Stephen Brett Greeley argues that in the AMC series *The Walking Dead*,¹⁸ Rick Grimes engages with the sense of lost humanity that zombies represent, an assessment that I agree with.¹⁹ However, he claims that 'sympathy for the undead in zombie films is unprecedented, and it speaks loudly to the essential worth of the human being,'²⁰ a claim that runs contrary to the events

and thematic structure of Romero's lesser known but important film *Day of the Dead* (1985). In this film, the mad Dr Logan is conducting gruesome experiments with the bodies of dead soldiers in an underground bunker, including feeding them to a pet zombie he nicknames Bub.²¹ Dr Logan becomes emotionally attached to Bub and seems to feel more sympathy for the undead than for their human victims. But rather than Dr Logan's experiments revealing the essential worth of the human being, instead, the temporarily sustained social structure in the film is undermined through this sympathy, which causes most of the human characters to reveal themselves as despicably selfish, racist and ultimately worthless. The film ends in death for most of these characters, who are torn apart in visceral scenes that force the viewer to experience the abject.

If sympathy is fatal, then extending Halberstam's notion of 'Gothic Technologies of subject production as they operate through the apparatus of the contemporary horror film' to zombies is justifiable.²² Zombies operate as a technology of meaning through their constant 'dismantling and reconstruction of bodily identities and also of spectatorial positions, gazes, and desires'.²³ Halberstam's ideas about how projection and visibility function in *Frankenstein* (1818) are useful precedents for understanding the zombie narrative as a symbolic realm where 'monstrosity and humanity emerge as inseparable'.²⁴ I would extend her focus on the body as the 'locus of fear' to zombie film and fiction generally.²⁵ In Romero's *Day of the Dead*, Dr Logan is nicknamed 'Frankenstein' by the other characters, due to his participation in human experimentation; this naming is conveniently appropriate, as Dr Logan does what Halberstam asserts Victor Frankenstein does; transforms the monsters, in this case zombies, into 'a screen, a place for the re-inscription of monstrosity'.²⁶ In the Freudian sense, this projection is actually mirroring, and therefore any zombie monstrosity is re-re-inscribed back onto the human body; killing zombies is therefore a continual destruction or attempt at eradication of the tainted portions of the individual or of humanity. In the collective sense, zombie narratives could represent our repressed or misunderstood desire to alter modes of production.

The release of *Night of the Living Dead* coincides with the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. That and the fact that the film features a black protagonist unjustly killed by the authorities was the beginning of a long and not necessarily understandable or consciously intended interrelationship of the zombie narrative to postcolonial dialogue.²⁷ The zombie then seems to have evolved into an abject symbol that forces the survivors in post-apocalyptic narratives to confront their own internalised notions of definitions and borders and to realise that those notions are as fragile as living tissue and can and will be eventually consumed. The adoption of the zombie for the purposes of the protest movement resonates with this individual psychological state that is glimpsed or accessed by readers or viewers of zombie narratives.²⁸ In their masquerading as zombies, protesters are (likely unwittingly) threatening the still persistent power structures of colonialism,

imperialism and capitalism, by both beseeching and exposing or pulverising the state. In this sense, even zombie walks staged by horror fans for pure joy are inherently political acts.

4. Afro-Orientalism as Political Alliance in *The Walking Dead*

If anyone is naive about the construction of identity in *The Walking Dead*, it is Rick Grimes. He rides on a horse towards Atlanta alone, in his Sheriff's uniform, wearing a stetson, carrying his sidearm and a bag of guns.²⁹ He is the ultimate stereotypical representation of white, masculine American culture: the cowboy. It is perhaps unexpected that analysis of *The Walking Dead* using the Afro-Orientalism framework laid out by Bill Mullen would yield any useful insight to connect the series to contemporary critical race theory. However, Mullen's assertion that the 'logic of equivalence'³⁰ put forward by early African-American political writers became a 'movement to reimagine black and Asian people as hand-holding grave diggers of Western capitalist modernity',³¹ is an idea I would very much like to test for applicability, beyond the obvious suitability of the language in this particular case. It might be crucial here to take note of Mullen's warning that recognising blackness could be a form of 'culturalist fundamentalism',³² that can lead to 'ahistoricist (and even racist) readings of both black and Asian culture'.³³ If Mullen is right in this warning, which he borrows from Vijay Prashad,³⁴ then we should be particularly wary of any diasporic cultural works, or representations of diaspora that 'celebrat[e] multiculturalism'.³⁵ But *The Walking Dead* does not relate to any distinct ethnicity or cultural group, nor does the series seem to celebrate multiculturalism. If anything, the series displaces all of its characters from their homeland in capitalist America and repositions them all in a quasi-Marxist fantasy world where their conceptions of race, gender and other stereotypes are continually tested, re-imagined and dismantled.

Throughout season one, Rick is guided into a new world order first by Morgan, an African-American single father, and then Glenn, a young Asian American. Glenn shows us very quickly that old cultural tropes are not relevant in the aftermath of the zombie apocalypse. After rescuing Rick from certain death, Glenn calls Rick out on his white cowboy heroics. Then later, as they continue to run from hordes of the undead, they have the following brief conversation:

Rick: "Back at the tank, why'd you stick your neck out for me?"

Glenn: "Call it foolish naive hope, that if I'm ever that far up shit creek, somebody might do the same for me. Guess I'm an even bigger dumbass than you."³⁶

Glenn has reason to question his chances of being treated fairly. The characters on the show seem to suffer under that trap of visibility first mentioned by Michel Foucault³⁷ and reiterated by Linda Alcoff, a trap 'that assures the automatic

functioning of power.³⁸ It is clear that the character Merle represents the remnants of this power as a constant threat to non-white bodies. The episode ends with what could be Glenn expressing his joy at being liberated from what Mullen calls the 'traditions of racial supremacy and superiority of Western culture'³⁹ when he escapes down the highway in a red Camaro. The road is empty and open to him, a cover of the Bo Diddley song 'I'm a Man' blaring as he laughs and hoots. He defies North American convention by piloting the car down the right hand lane of the highway; the clear road is a representation of his new psychological and social freedom post-apocalypse.

Rick's new identity is negotiated in *The Walking Dead* partly through interacting with characters who embody that aspect of Mullen's Afro-Orientalism that represents: 'a counterdiscourse to Western modernity precisely when it eschews the temptations of culturalism and raciology.'⁴⁰ These characters are few, but they also survive the longest in the series and include Daryl, a white redneck who defies the teleology of Capitalism as much as Glenn and Michonne do. Afro-Orientalism allows these characters to live communally together as they struggle to understand and remake the world around them. Michonne is the character that most visibly represents Afro-Orientalism at its most violent and political. She spends much of her time silent and alone, carries a samurai sword and travels with two zombies on chains. She could represent the link 'between and among people of color in response to white Western domination.'⁴¹ Her enslaving of two zombies in this case could represent her reclaiming and ultimately destroying colonialism.

5. Feeding on Human Failure: Zombie Novels and Abject Affect

There is something inherently subversive about any work that imagines the end of the world. What we do when we imagine the end is acknowledge that civilisation, as we know it, either could or should, end. In David Moody's novel *Autumn* (2010), Michael Collins stands as a guest speaker in front of a classroom of students who do not want to be there and direct animosity towards him. He hates 'compromising himself'⁴² by speaking to the students and thinks that 'if the behaviour and apathy of the students wasn't bad enough, now even the teacher was being sarcastic'⁴³ in response to the teacher's ineffective effort to calm the students. In other words, a room is purposefully filled with people in order that they might sit there and disdain the way in which power has exercised control over them. This is only one example of how everyday life is presented as undesirable or unbearable only moments before the zombie apocalypse begins. The extent to which zombie narratives do or do not allow society to rebuild in the wake of the zombie apocalypse is an indication of the degree of hope any particular author might have for the society in which we currently live. This phenomenon is recognisable in the Romero films, which become progressively bleaker from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) through to *Survival of the Dead* (2009). In the latter – the sixth entry in Romero's series – the rights of the zombies are respected more

than the rights of human beings. The characters seem to suffer the most when they repeat the damaging patterns that allowed the apocalypse to happen in the first place. Some of the more carefully considered zombie fiction demonstrate this through allusion to the history of imperialism and the pitfalls of its biopolitics and corporate hegemonies. Max Brooks' *World War Z* (2006) is the most easily recognisable as a text that functions in this fashion, despite the fact that it may also naively reinforce patriarchy and militarism, often at the same time.⁴⁴

World War Z, like *Day of the Dead*, invites viewing the zombie as the natural postmodern successor to Frankenstein, the monster that – according to Halberstam – is ‘always part of his maker.’⁴⁵ In *World War Z*, the zombies are compared to African Golem legends from which ‘Mary Shelley stole the idea for her book Frankenstein.’⁴⁶ Humans are further conflated with zombies: ‘wouldn’t destruction of the brain be the only way to annihilate these creatures? Isn’t it the only way to annihilate us as well?’⁴⁷ The character Jurgen Warmbrunn answers his own question by claiming that we are all just ‘a brain kept alive by a complex and vulnerable machine we call the body’⁴⁸ and then identifies the fact that ‘the only measurable difference between us and “The Undead” [is that] their brains do not require a support system to survive.’⁴⁹ The zombie urge to feed then, is disconnected from any form of necessity; feeding is just another representation of monstrosity. In Seanan McGuire’s novel *Feed* (2010), which was published under the pseudonym Mira Grant, the zombie urge to feed on brains is conflated with the urge of human beings to consume information. In the book, Senator Ryman appears to experience stress as a result of not having ‘had a site feed since the outbreak bell rang.’⁵⁰ The death of a key character is a shallow secondary concern to the Senator when compared to his desire for information; the fact of his political status serves as yet another projected form of that dead or abject presence within. The characters in the novel focus more on the ability to consume and share information and not on the actual interpretation or relevance of that information. Thus *Feed*, like *Autumn* and *World War Z*, draws attention to something rotten or horrible within the mind that is projected onto society.

6. Conclusion: You Are What Eats You

These works of post-apocalyptic fiction that map technologies of anxiety and fear onto the body seem to invite a continual purge of undesirable elements from civilisation. The surprising apokálypsis⁵¹ is that this purge does not represent a desire for the reification of colonial, capitalist, patriarchal or Orientalist power structures through discriminatory political practice. Instead, zombie narratives could represent a potent collective desire to purge the unhealthy parts of the mind that have been created by those very structures. The powerfully abject form of the zombie and its accompanying level of violence and visceral gore has risen prominently in popular culture and has now been folded into protest movements against globalising hegemonies. Both facts could be indications that a desire to

change the individual mind through confrontation with the abject is representative of a collective but repressed human desire for widespread and significant social change. So if we are the walking dead, that might be a good thing.

Notes

¹ Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (New York: Broadway Paperbacks, 2006), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 61.

³ George A. Romero, Interview with Noel Murray, 'The Onion' (The A.V. Club, February 12, 2008), accessed 13 May 2013, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/george-romero.14198/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Gerry Canavan, 'Fighting a War You've Already Lost: Zombies and Zombis in Firefly/Serenity and Dollhouse', *Science Fiction Film and Television* 4, No. 2 (2011): 179.

⁶ Here I use the term in its etymological sense, an uncovering or revealing. Zombies are constantly uncovering what is inside of human beings, both literally and metaphorically.

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 48. Kindle edition.

⁸ Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 21. I borrow Halberstam's term and take a certain liberty in extending her definition of the Gothic to include the zombie.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ The films key to understanding the genre include those of George Romero and Danny Boyle but encompass a large proportion of standalone works such as *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) as well as films not primarily associated with the zombie, such as *The Road* (2009). For television series, I focus primarily on AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010-2013) but also consider other post-apocalyptic series.

¹¹ A good example would be the London police shooting of Charles de Menezes in 2005, widely believed to have occurred due to fears he was a suicide bomber. Police were criticised for racial profiling of de Menezes due to his visible characteristics. The incident is a good example of how bodies themselves are conflated with fears of destructive technology.

¹² Tavia Nyong'o, 'The Scene of Occupation', *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, No. 4 (2012): 140, accessed 24 January 2013, <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/DRAM.a.00219>. Nyong'o discusses at length how the zombie manipulates both time and space in surprising and resilient ways. He also points out that it might be naïve to see the zombie craze as merely cosplay in the 'post-9/11' world (147).

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ George A. Romero, *Night of the Living Dead*, dir. George A. Romero (1968; Pittsburgh, PA: Image Ten, 2002 Millennium Edition), DVD.

¹⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 5.

¹⁸ Frank Darabont, *The Walking Dead*, Broadcast Series, dir. Frank Darabont, perf. Andrew Lincoln, Steven Yuen, Norman Reedus, aired 31 October 2010 (2010; Senoia, GA: AMC, 2012), Television.

¹⁹ Stephen Brett Greeley, 'Monsters of Modernity', *The Walking Dead and Philosophy: Zombie Apocalypse Now* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2012), 168.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ George A. Romero, *Day of the Dead*, dir. George A. Romero (Pittsburgh, PA: United Film Distribution Company, 1998 [1985]), DVD.

²² Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 138.

²³ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ Romero/Murray, 'The Onion'. George Romero has admitted in this interview, that Ben's race in *Night of the Living Dead* was a primarily arbitrary decision, while Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* comics do not seem to engage with racism in the same way that the AMC television series does.

²⁸ That state being something akin to Freud's 'Urfantasiën.' Kristeva describes how the vision of the abject brings this state about: 'The vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible ob-ject, a boundary and a limit. A fantasy, if you wish, but one that brings to the well-known Freudian primal fantasies, his *Urfantasiën*, a drive overload of hatred or death, which prevents images from crystalizing as images of desire and/or nightmare and causes them to break out into sensation (suffering) and denial (horror), into a blasting of sight and sound (fire, uproar). Apocalyptic vision could thus be the shattering or the impossibility not only of narrative but also of *Urfantasiën* under the pressure of a drive unleashed by a doubtless very "primal" narcissistic wound' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 154-55).

²⁹ Frank Darabont, 'Days Gone By', *The Walking Dead*, season 1, episode 1, dir. Frank Darabont, aired Oct. 31, 2010.

³⁰ Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 25.

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- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid., 27.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Vijay Prashad, Introduction to *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), xv-xix.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Frank Darabont, 'Guts', *The Walking Dead*, season 1, episode 2, dir. Michelle MacLaren, aired November 7, 2010.
- ³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 200.
- ³⁸ Linda Alcoff, 'Identity and Visibility', in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201.
- ³⁹ Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism*, 27.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 12.
- ⁴² David Moody, *Autumn* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010), 8-9.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 9.
- ⁴⁴ Max Brooks, *World War Z*, 183. In the novel, society is stabilised by military tactics while female characters are criticised for bearing feminine traits. The two occur simultaneously in the text when Colonel Christina Eliopolis is belittled by the character Mets: 'What are you, you're fucking mother?!' she taunts in an effort to motivate Eliopolis to survive that equates the feminine and the civilian with certain death.
- ⁴⁵ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 53.
- ⁴⁶ Max Brooks, *World War Z*, 33.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 35.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Mira Grant, *Feed* (New York: Orbit Books, 2010), 554.
- ⁵¹ From the Greek meaning 'to uncover, or reveal'.

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Zombie Survival Guides: Denying the Apocalypse

Kelly Gardner

Abstract

There is an undeniable connection between the zombie and the notion of apocalypse, so much so that the first has come to imply the second, implicating Zombie literature in the liminal space between the two genres of Gothic and Science fiction respectively. The intention of this chapter is to explore the relationship between eschatological fiction and the zombie, especially how the presence of the zombie affects the ultimate aim and intention of the apocalyptic vision. If apocalyptic literature is to be successful in its endeavours, it must use the destruction of apocalypse as a catalyst for the envisioning of a new way of being. The role of apocalyptic literature is thus to present the reader with an opportunity to imagine the destruction of the world as they know it, and to work through the transitional process, resulting in a final abandoning of the old way of life and an acceptance of the New. However, the presence of zombies within the apocalyptic environment encompasses a shift in attention away from the apocalypse and towards the figure of the zombie: the focus shifts away from the apocalypse towards the challenge of surviving the zombies, as opposed to the apocalypse itself, to the extent to which we may say that the figure of the zombie derails and compromises the generic intentions of apocalyptic fiction. While many zombie-based apocalyptic texts maintain the presence of the zombie while successfully negotiating and exploring notions of apocalypse – one particular sub-genre of literature, the zombie apocalypse survival guide, has been particularly unsuccessful in this regard, for in its attempt to survive the onslaught of zombies, the survival guide essentially marginalises, sidesteps and denies the apocalypse by failing to acknowledge the necessary transition from old world to new world, focusing instead only on the elimination of the zombie-as-threat.

Key Words: Zombie, apocalypse, Kermode, Wagar, Matheson, survivalist, eschatological, gothic, science fiction.

1. Apocalypse

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode addresses eschatological fictions and explores their popularity as a genre, arguing that apocalyptic notions are used as a means of establishing a sense of belonging in the world – as an attempt to relate oneself to a beginning and an end, imagining a ‘significance for themselves in these unremembered but imaginable events.’¹ Kermode begins his examination by approaching apocalypse as something ‘which ends, transforms, and is concordant,’² and views apocalyptic thought as rectilinear, as opposed to the more

common cyclical view of apocalypse. As Kermode argues, ‘events derive their significance from a unitary system, not from their correspondence with events in other cycles.’³ A period of time should be seen as an ordered series of events that comes to an end and has no relation to any other series of events but rather stands on its own.

Humankind, for Kermode, essentially elevates itself to the most important species on the planet; while the personal death of an individual exposes the insignificance of the single man, we turn instead to imagining the common death of the species at large in order to establish our importance. Though seemingly a fantasy concerning humanity’s demise, apocalyptic fiction serves to re-inscribe the centrality of the human race, and with it, a humanist system of values. Similarly, the continued popularity of End of Time prophecies and eschatological literature throughout history exposes the conception of a culture’s establishment of its own generation as being paramount; this is evident in the continual immanence of the supposed apocalypse.

Kermode uses the rhetorical trope of *peripeteia* in examining the falsification of apocalyptic beliefs. Peripeteia refers to a reversal or change of circumstance or a turning point, a sudden movement towards the opposite of what is, and has been, expected. It is a sudden reversal determined by intellect or logic. Kermode explains this rhetorical trope by stating:

Now peripeteia depends on our confidence of the end; it is a disconfirmation followed by a consonance; the interest of having our expectations falsified is obviously related to our wish to reach the discovery or recognition by an unexpected and instructive route.⁴

Kermode insists that this change is not dependent on our reluctance to reach an end but rather views our assimilation of peripeteia as a means of readjusting what we expect from the end.⁵ If we consider this notion with regard to zombies, it is evident that for the zombie narrative the peripeteiac reversal or turn is always the initial appearance of the zombie itself: from their very first emergence within the narrative, there is a shift in narrative direction, and in most cases this shift dramatically points towards a definitive end, if not of the world, then towards the end of society and civilisation as the character knows it.

Of late, apocalyptic literature has seen an emphasis on the end as being transitional, with the cause of the apocalypse often remaining unspecified.⁶ The end is no longer the lead attraction; instead it has become something we assume, a part of the transition towards a new world. Due to this change in perceptions of apocalypse, the narratives that explore them have witnessed a development; the emphasis is now on survival in a post-apocalyptic world, as opposed to merely surviving the apocalypse.

While Kermode views eschatological fiction as man's attempt to make sense of his position in history, and essentially making sense of his place in the world, Ketterer⁷ and Wagar⁸ are more concerned with the formal properties of Eschatological fiction, particularly that of the science fiction genre, as being an instructive example of dealing with change. Science fiction, as a literary genre, falls into the category of Speculative Fiction. It sets itself apart from other speculative fictions in that it presents the reader with what could be assumed to be *plausible* content of futuristic environments, parallel universes and space travel, to name but a few. While the scenarios of science fiction are indeed fictional, there is an emphasis on the plausibility of the content, as opposed to the fantastical elements of other speculative fictions. To adapt Kermode's, albeit essentialist, theory and apply it to a reading of science fiction: if we view our epoch as a *saeculum* of transition, science fiction deals with our process of accepting this change. We essentially become accustomed to the possibility of gross fantastical change and in reading about these possible future situations we develop a level of acceptance. The end of the world is not the culmination of our time on earth; rather it acts as the catalyst for a prosperous new world. As Ketterer suggests, 'science fiction is not primarily valuable as prediction. Rather, it teaches adaptability and elasticity of mind in the face of change.'⁹

2. Zombie Apocalypse

The seed of what has now grown into the contemporary (though by no means the earliest) imaginings of the zombie was first planted in the gothic genre with Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*.¹⁰ The novel saw its protagonist, Robert Neville, existing, isolated, in the midst of a worldwide apocalypse, as the sole survivor of a mysterious pandemic, which caused sufferers to exhibit vampiric/zombie-like tendencies. It was not until the 1964 film adaptation *The Last Man on Earth* that the early form of the zombie began to take shape.¹¹ The pandemic-infected figures are seen to shamble around the screen, void of the flair and elegance commonly associated with vampires. The trailer for the film makes multiple references to their zombie-like nature and opens with the title 'This is the world of the living dead,'¹² – a phrase which went on to inspire George Romero's, *Night of the Living Dead*, a mere four years later.¹³ As David Pagano suggests, 'Romero's films invoke the particularly apocalyptic paradox that the world must end in order for there to be any future for the world,'¹⁴ a theme which we see recurring in the multitude of zombie narratives following Romero's lead.

While Romero is famously credited as the creator of the modern zombie, it is Matheson's narrative that not only connects the figure of the zombie with apocalypse, but also sees to it that the zombie has its foundation in science fiction. John Browning explains that Matheson's novel was the first to interpret the zombie and vampire mythos within a dystopian framework; similarly, it was the first to connect the zombie with mob-mentality.¹⁵ Matheson's novel centres on the

formation and maintenance of a survival space; the protagonist's daily activities are methodically formulated around a dreary survival, which sees the humdrum, repetitive nature of Robert Neville's existence. His life, post-apocalypse, resembles the mundane, suburban way of life of pre-apocalyptic existence: he works hard during the day to provide himself with food and security; at night he escapes to the refuge of his fortified home: he listens to music on his record player and drinks alcohol to numb the dissatisfaction he feels towards his way of life. He cannot escape the pattern of life to which he had grown accustomed, and this inability to adapt to change is what leads to his eventual downfall. The post-apocalyptic world of *I am Legend* is divided into three categories of beings: Robert Neville; the only surviving human immune to the pandemic, the vampire/zombies; dead bodies resurrected through infection – and finally; a group of humans who have overcome the vampiric qualities of the infection and are attempting to rebuild society, and who are essentially the new form of human. Neville works tirelessly to destroy as many of the infected as possible, but he is unaware that there is a distinction between the infected living and the infected dead, so he kills unassumingly and relentlessly. His quest to rid the world of the vampires is seen by himself as virtuous and necessary, but the pandemic survivors view him as a monster, something they must conquer in order for them to build a new society. Once they have captured him, Ruth, the woman who was sent out to lure him in, asks him why he failed to flee after she had warned him of the new society's plan: "I couldn't... go. I was too used to the house. It was a habit, just... like the habit of living. I got... used to it."¹⁶ Neville's attachment to the old way of life leads to his eventual capture and death. Ruth attempts to explain the society's actions and Neville realises that his failure to adapt to the new ways of the post-apocalyptic world has resulted in him becoming monstrous in the eyes of the remaining survivors.

The full realisation of his position outside of society comes when Ruth tells him: "Robert Neville," ... , "the last of the old race."¹⁷ Once he has been killed, there will no longer be any of his kind left in the new society. Robert realises that he has no place within the new world; he has become 'anathema and black terror to be destroyed'¹⁸ and he accepts his fate as the process of an evolving civilisation, once something he was a part of, but to which he has now become a mere superstition:

Full circle, he thought while the final lethargy crept into his limbs. Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend.¹⁹

There is a necessary correlation between the destruction of the old world and the birth of the New Jerusalem; I will apply the term *peripeteia* to Ketterer's

research and argue that he recognises the necessary peripeteia within the moment of juxtaposition. Ketterer states:

The apocalyptic imagination may finally be defined in terms of its philosophical preoccupation with the moment of juxtaposition and consequent transformation or transfiguration when an old world of mind discovers a believable new world of mind, which either nullifies and destroys the old system entirely or, less likely, makes it part of the larger design.²⁰

As he maintains that the notion of apocalypse, ‘allows for a dialectic, conflict, or tension of oppositions.’²¹ Ketterer considers the fragile precipice upon which ‘order maintains itself’²² against the threatening unknown that stands before it, and suggests that:

The successive collapse of meaning and structural coherence, of which we are today painfully aware, has long been a concern of the American imagination. But the fulfillment of the apocalyptic imagination demands that the destructive chaos give way finally to a new order.²³

Ketterer locates science fiction as the purest outlet of apocalyptic thought, but recognises that it also finds expression within the gothic mode.²⁴ When considering this connection between science fiction and the gothic, it can be ascertained that the zombie, a hybrid monster birthed from the liminality of science fiction possibility and gothic monstrosity, has stepped forward as the harbinger of the apocalypse and with him has emerged a specific subgenre of literature, the *Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide*.

3. Surviving the Apocalypse

While the zombie narrative details the unfolding of, or the years following, a zombie apocalypse, the zombie survival guide acts as a manual to overcoming the apocalypse. The approach towards the apocalypse is one of pragmatic rationalism and, in effect, reduces the apprehensive sense of panic projected onto such an event. Wagar touches on the possibility of Domsday fiction as being mildly therapeutic; if this is so, then survival guides are the forerunner of this category.²⁵

With regards to eschatological fiction, Wagar believes that ‘they enable us to imagine ourselves heroically evading death, as we identify with the survivors of the world disaster.’²⁶ Survival guides take this a step further by giving us the tools to manifest our survival, should we find ourselves in the same situation as the characters of eschatological fiction. Survival guides are essentially maps towards a post-disaster utopia. The embodiment of a post-disaster utopia plan would be Sean

T. Page's *War Against The Walking Dead*, where he covers the usual zombie apocalypse information, detailing the process of zombification and the pseudo-science behind the disease.²⁷ Page argues that War against the walking dead will only be won once society is able to reestablish themselves into functional communities. The chapters that follow Page's extensive discussion of weapons and tactile deployment are focused on one thing, victory over the walking dead, which is, at its core, a model for the reformation of society.

Zombie narratives are less concerned with the existential morality of the individual and focus, rather, on the process of survival. Zombie survival guides, in particular, fail to address existential thought but place an emphasis on pragmatic utilitarian modes of survival and the reformation of communities that evoke pre-apocalyptic ways of life. However, the zombie acts as the subject to which our attention is directed and when viewed literally, zombie survival guides center around surviving zombies, not surviving an apocalypse.

The zombie survival guide, while elaborate in its discussion of tactile deployment, fails to address the societal problems represented by the figure of the zombie. The post-apocalyptic utopia that zombie survival guides attempt to create is essentially a false utopia. A utopia is dependent on the apocalypse as being transitional; it presupposes a change has to occur which will differentiate the Old World from the New World. Zombie survival guides neglect the necessary *change* and instead focus on killing zombies and rebuilding a world that reflects what existed before. There is, however, a more successful second strand within this sub-genre, namely a survival guide for surviving the apocalypse *as a zombie*. These new survival guides reimagine the world as one dominated by zombies, zombies become the majority and the true means of survival is to abandon human life and live as one of the walking dead. Survival guides such as *Zombies for Zombies: Advice and Etiquette for the Living Dead*, a tongue in cheek parody of the 'For Dummies' self-help books, teach the reader how to adapt to life as a zombie.²⁸ *The Zombie Bible* is a two part book that recognises the chances of surviving a zombie apocalypse as slim and first acts a standard survival guide and then digresses into a guide on how to survive once infected.²⁹ One guide in particular has taken the notion of adaption and survival to a new level and teaches the reader 'How to Speak Zombie' with an audio guide and detailed translation of the 10 included sounds, with the default, suitable in any situation of 'BRAIIINS'.³⁰ While these guides are a satirical approach to zombie guides that take themselves, arguably, too seriously, they successfully adhere to the true trajectory of apocalypse. They do not deny the apocalypse by attempting to reinstate the governance and way of life pre-apocalypse, but adapt to the post apocalyptic world and serve as guides through the transition from one way of life to the New Jerusalem, in a similar vein as that seen in Matheson's *I Am Legend*. While the standard Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide essentially denies a true Utopia, the Guides for Surviving *as a Zombie*

recognise the Utopian ideal as something we might not have expected, as a new way of imagining the world, albeit as a zombie.

4. Conclusion

The zombie is a figure representative of many things, but it is ultimately a representative of the destructive forces of the time. As this chapter has maintained, the hybridity of the genre means that the intention of the zombie apocalypse is two-fold: Gothic literature aims to reveal that which we abject, while science fiction attempts to teach the reader adaptability to change.

The apocalypse requires some sort of transitional change in order to advance from the old world to the new world and the presence of the zombie is representative of that which must change. The zombie survival guide attempts to guide its readers through the apocalypse and towards a utopia, but this utopia is falsified in that the survival guide fails to recognise the necessary metaphorical change that is required by the apocalypse. Guides for *Zombies* and *I Am Legend* are thus examples of successful zombie apocalypses, in that the death of Robert Neville, and of the living, is the true casting off of the old world. It is the end of one saeculum and the beginning of a new one – and with this we see that the sense of an ending gives way to a new beginning.

Notes

¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction: With a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

² Ibid., 5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ While there may be reference to the cataclysm that initiated the Apocalypse, few narratives are dedicated to an investigation into the specific cause of said cataclysm. There is, instead, a focus on the way of life during and post apocalypse. Examples of this can be seen in John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Alden Bell's *The Reapers Are the Angels* (2010), and the *Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guides* which necessitate an apocalypse has occurred, regardless of the cause.

⁷ David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974).

⁸ W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

⁹ Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, 25.

¹⁰ Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: Robinson, 1987).

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- ¹¹ William Leicester, Richard Matheson, Furio M. Monetti and Ubaldo Ragona, *The Last Man on Earth*, dirs. Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow (Rome, Italy: 20th Century Fox, 1964), DVD.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ George A. Romero and John A. Russo, *Night of the Living Dead*, dir. George A. Romero (Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh: The Walter Reade Organisation, 1968), DVD.
- ¹⁴ David Pagano, 'The Space of Apocalypse in Zombie Cinema', *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*, eds. Shawn McIntosh and Marc Leverette (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2008), 71.
- ¹⁵ John Edgar Browning, 'Survival Horrors, Survival Spaces: Tracing the Modern Zombie (Cine)myth', *Horror Studies* 2, No. 1 (2010).
- ¹⁶ Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 155.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 157.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 159.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 160.
- ²⁰ Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, 13.
- ²¹ Ibid., 7-8.
- ²² Ibid., 14.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 15.
- ²⁵ Wagar, *Terminal Visions*, 70.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Sean T. Page, *War against the Walking Dead* (Melbourne: Severed, 2011).
- ²⁸ David P. Murphy and Daniel Heard, *Zombies for Zombies: Advice and Etiquette for the Living Dead: The World's Bestselling Program for the Recently Bitten* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2009).
- ²⁹ Ian Hall and Lorraine James, *The Zombie Bible: A Zombie Guide to Surviving the Holocaust: Living as a Zombie, and Surviving to the End When a Vaccine is Delivered* (USA: Hallanish Publishing, 2012).
- ³⁰ Steve Mockus and Travis Millard, *How to Speak Zombie: A Guide for the Living* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2010).

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Board Up Your Windows, Lock Your Doors, No Help Is Coming: Zombies and Divine Violence

Russell Ramey

Abstract

Slavoj Žižek challenges that as ‘We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay’ we have simultaneously become ‘obsessed with cosmic catastrophes’; that it has become ‘much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than a modest change in capitalism.’¹ Without denying the validity of the point, consider the peculiar irony of the apocalypticism in his work. Despite this and his fascination with film, Žižek has never engaged with the zombie genre academically even though the core themes of the genre bear striking resemblance to Walter Benjamin’s Divine Violence – a core concept of Žižek’s *Violence* (2008). Drawing upon Gerry Canavan and Kyle Bishop’s work on Zombie Cinema, this chapter discusses the ambivalence of the zombie invasion narrative and how it can be applied to *Violence*. The zombie is a laden signifier of American cultural guilt; its colonial and biopolitical sins returning in a fantasy landscape. The uncertain boundaries, especially between living and undead, stand for the creation of Self and Other: it is only sustained by violence and the only resolution is annihilation. The Divine Violence of the zombie is clear, but the narrative is not optimistic. When the angel of history moves, the zombie apocalypse narrative realises the fear that Žižek cannot acknowledge. The unresolvable element that draws us continuously back to the apocalypse is our complicity in an unsatisfactory, guilty, world, and whether any change can be anything but against ‘us’: that nothing can be saved, everything must go. The inability to ‘go to the end’ in the zombie apocalypse scenario is a way to envisage the hesitance and trauma of the ‘true ethical act.’²

Key Words: Zombies, Bishop, Canavan, Žižek, Benjamin, divine violence, violence.

The primary impetus behind this chapter is a consideration of Slavoj Žižek’s comment he has made on several occasions with roughly the same wording: that our cultural obsession with ‘cosmic catastrophes’ is related to, even symptomatic of, a silent acceptance that ‘global capitalism is here to stay.’³ When he says that it has become ‘much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than a modest change in capitalism,’⁴ there are two distinct concepts to be examined: ‘the end of all life’ versus ‘modest change.’ While Žižek has not at any length examined it, the present ‘renaissance’ of the ‘zombie’ genre indicates that it is one of the most resonant expressions of the apocalypse theme. Numerous attempts to answer why

the walking dead fill this role so well have been attempted, and a fully convincing case that encompasses the entire genre is beyond my scope here. Rather, I think the more narrow type, the ‘zombie apocalypse’ scenario that defines the contemporary undead craze, which is almost certainly the invention of the defining zombie film auteur George A. Romero in his *Living Dead* series (1968-2010) can be imagined as a vision of Žižek’s more ‘modest’ proposition. While Žižek is always clear on his preference for something other than capitalism, usually ambiguously defined but provocatively stated to be ‘communism,’ he is generally more circumspect as to how to achieve this, exactly. When pushed, he has insisted that he is not here to tell us what to do, deferring that he would prefer to discuss Jacques Lacan.⁵ Despite this lack of specific statements of ‘how,’ his insistence on the possibility of radical emancipatory action in *Violence* is highly suggestive. It is in this text, particularly his reading of Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘Divine Violence,’ that the productive comparison can be made. While the similarities are interesting, it is the difficulties that will be focused on in this discussion. The zombie apocalypse is often a vehicle for social commentary, depicting the irruption of violence ‘out of nowhere’⁶ that shatters a world shown to be ‘out of joint.’⁷ However, the zombie monster lacks interiority – it cannot be related to or empathised with; it cannot literally speak. The zombie is often described as a pastiche of colonial subjectivities, the dehumanised – examples of this I take from Kyle Bishop and Gerry Canavan. This inaccessibility fixes the perspective of the reader/viewer in the position of that which is passing. Zombie films only ask, as it was said in Romero’s 2007 *Diary of the Dead*, ‘Are we really worth saving? You tell me.’⁸ They do not, and can not, ask if we can save ourselves.

Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ (1921) has become something of an industry in the academy. Catherine Kellogg called it ‘the *ur-text* for discussions of police violence, sovereignty, life in the state of exception, revolution, political theology, and... the question of ethical violence.’⁹ Numerous theorists have poured over it, including notables such as Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler and of course, Žižek.¹⁰ The ‘Critique’ is a text notable for both being incredibly difficult and highly provocative, concerning the nature of ethics and law at that most of ragged of edges, violence, and unsettlingly open to interpretation. It is something of a flame to the moth, or staring into the proverbial Nietzschean abyss.

Any attempt to explain the ‘Critique’ would be doomed on my part, but I must attempt some humble outline. Violence and Law are, to Benjamin, deeply and seemingly inextricably entwined. Violence is more than simply physical harm; the violent aspect of it appears to be the power of coercion, as he argues that it is the desire to change the law that distinguishes kinds of strike tactics. A labour strike with demands is violent, one without, one that simply seeks to smash the law or the state, is ‘pure’ or ‘unadulterated.’ The occurrence of what is commonly considered violence, physical harm upon persons or property, does not appear to be what define violence for Benjamin.¹¹ Violence is the act of creating or sustaining law;

violent acts create a law where there was not one, or by repetition of the violent act sustain the law. This is why he uses the term ‘Mythic Violence’ for law-creating violence, using the Greek myth of Niobe as the main example. In this case, there was no law or prohibition before the violent punishment meted out by Mythic gods, they are offended by a mortal action and the prohibition is made by the act of retaliation. The reminder of mythic violence remains as a stain, a reminder or an example of what will happen if you transgress the law. Similarly, in the legend of Niobe, the mother stayed as a statue to weep for the deaths of her children. It makes examples and thereby sustains power.¹²

If then the law is primarily concerned with nothing more than sustaining itself and it does so by sustaining the threat of violence, which is a coercive violence itself, and can only do so by repeating violence, it is illegitimate. Benjamin opposes Law to Justice: ‘Justice is the principle of all divine endmaking, power the principle of all mythic lawmaking.’¹³ Myth makes; Divine Justice ends. Therefore he posits a kind of violence, as in the ‘proletarian’ strike, opposed to mythic lawmaking, that is, somehow ‘clean’, able to remove the stain of mythic violence without establishing a new law and cycle of violence.¹⁴

The outstanding question that keeps drawing people to this text is what ‘divine violence’ might look like. How might it be accomplished? This suggests it is desirable, thus entailing that the assertion that law is violence is relatively acceptable. Žižek’s book *Violence* saves Benjamin for the climax, but is in many ways an assent to Benjamin’s case, or an expansion thereon. The primary thesis is that the violence we think of as such, murder and explosions and robbery or even harassment are merely one aspect, a tip of the iceberg, of the violence permeating our society, and like the tip of the iceberg, the part we can see is often grossly misleading of the scope of what lies underneath. ‘Subjective violence’ is a distraction that keeps us from examining the deeper causes for it, the ‘systemic’ and ‘symbolic’ violence that permeate and sustain our society and create the conditions for subjective violence. This appears to be an elaboration, with specific cases, of Benjamin’s thesis that the law-violence symbiosis perpetuates itself.

If this is the case, there must be a way to end the self-perpetuating cycle of law-violence, and so too Žižek turns to ‘divine violence,’ but Žižek differentiates himself from other debates on the topic by choosing to ‘fearlessly identify divine violence with positively existing historical phenomena, thus avoiding any obscurantist mystification.’¹⁵ He asserts that divine violence is not at all ‘yet another leftist dream of a “pure” event that never takes place’ – it is real; it has and can be done.¹⁶ While in the epilogue he endorses a radical non-violence, he does not equate divine violence with pacifism, calling examples like the Red Terror or rioting in Brazilian favelas divine violence.¹⁷ Not:

afraid to assert the formal parallel between the state annihilation of *Homini Sacer*, for example the Nazi killing of the Jews, and

the revolutionary terror where one can also kill without committing a crime and without sacrifice.¹⁸

Žižek directs the annihilating purpose of divine violence towards the ‘guilty’,¹⁹ rather than perhaps to the law itself.

There is a kernel here that suggests we may be able to use zombies as a way of thinking about divine violence. Žižek states that ‘Divine violence is an expression of pure drive, of the undeadness, the excess of life, which strikes at “bare life” regulated by law,’ and ‘Divine violence purifies the guilty not of guilt but of law, because law is limited to the living: it cannot reach beyond life to touch what is in excess of life, what is more than mere life.’²⁰ That which is not life but only the excess, the drive, that strikes only at the living – is this not the definition of the zombie?

I am not at all the first to draw a connection between zombies and divine violence. Gerry Canavan’s 2011 article ‘Fighting a War You’ve Already Lost: Zombies and Zombis in *Firefly*/*Serenity* and *Dollhouse*’ connects the adoption of zombie traits, a kind of deadness, of being beyond mortality, by protagonists in the works of Joss Whedon to overthrow corrupt regimes. He does not need to take the additional step to the protagonists to make the equation, however. His 2010 article, “‘We *Are* the Walking Dead’: Race, Time, and Survival in Zombie Narrative’ makes the connection between zombie narratives and Foucault’s ‘biopolitics,’ the ‘state of exception’ and Agamben’s ‘homo sacer.’²¹ His reading of the zombie apocalypse narrative and *The Walking Dead* is derived from postcolonial theory. He references John Rieder’s interpretation of H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* as a ‘chickens-come-home-to-roost’ reversal of British colonialism, extending that the zombie narrative is a modern version of that, adapted for the current biopolitics and its most salient feature, the State of Exception.²² This is the biopolitical extermination of Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* (man which may be killed without it being murder or sacrifice)²³ referenced as the mirror to Divine Violence by Žižek. The zombie is a kind of perfect hyperbole of anti-life. It looks human, but is not. It is mindless, dangerous, and infectious. Not only is there no moral ambiguity in killing the zombie, it is a survival imperative to do so. Hesitation at the presence of a former loved one turned zombie is universally a mistake in the zombie apocalypse. Disease embodied, the zombie apocalypse scenario licenses unlimited rights in the name of survival. This is where the title of the chapter ‘Board Up Your Windows, Lock Your Doors’ originates, as almost every zombie apocalypse narrative contains lines of that kind on a television or radio. The message is nearly always in vain, as the radio signals turn to static or the television stops broadcasting²⁴ and the state collapses.

This inevitability is the joy and irony and meat of the zombie apocalypse. Give the state exactly what it secretly wants and it will choke on it. The endless license to make live or let die usually reserved for the biopolitical state is inherited by the

survivor, who in most stories will face hard decisions about resources and safety, and inevitably these decisions surround the danger of other people. The license of the state of exception, to kill without remorse, extends to everyone, the 'killability' of the zombie 'infects' us.²⁵

Despite these problematic excesses, it is embedded in the zombie narrative – a persistent inheritance from George Romero – that this seemingly meaningless violence is deserved. Žižek says that divine violence is 'the sign of the injustice of the world, of the world being "out of joint."'²⁶ This does not mean that it has some 'deeper meaning,' rather, attributing meaning to it is a 'temptation to be resisted.'²⁷ The desire to attribute meaning to it is a defence against the trauma of the unrestrained freedom of divine violence.²⁸

However, to say that divine violence happens simply because the world is 'out of joint' would be to make it indistinguishable from the outbursts of subjective violence, 'blind passages a l'acte' that Žižek insists that it is not.²⁹ Strangely, after suggesting against mystification and boldly pointing to real acts of revolutionary violence as divine violence, Žižek backs away. If the passage a l'acte is the sign of the impotence of men, then divine violence is the sign of the impotence of the Big Other, of the inability of censure and censor to prevent human action.³⁰ For Žižek, divine violence is a decision made in 'solitude,'³¹ it is 'radically subjective, it is the subject's *work of love*.'³² It belongs to the order of event, not being, and so is only perceivable as divine, and therefore distinguishable from blind acting out or mythic-criminal violence, *by the person or persons engaged in it*. This claim of real, identifiable historic divine violence is difficult to reconcile with this. Nor can I easily negotiate this radical subjectivity to the zombie. The zombie is more object than subject, and should be incapable of such. The zombie does not speak.

Rather than an insurmountable barrier, this is precisely why I think the zombie apocalypse is an excellent model for imagining divine violence. If divine violence is radically subjective, then the work it does of erasing an unjust world, or suspending the law to usher in a new world, can only appear as meaningless, rampant and monstrous to the observer. The perfect impenetrable Other of the zombie, destroying all the world for no discernible purpose, matches this beautifully. The history of the zombie monster was fertile ground to imagine uprising. Bishop describes the zombie, especially the early pre-Romero Haitian zombie, as kind of sub-subaltern, a being so thoroughly oppressed that it not only cannot speak to power but cannot speak, that transformed into something more like a revolt or 'proletarian uprising' in Romero's 1969 *Night of the Living Dead* as a metaphor for rapid social upheaval that society cannot adapt to. The model from which most zombie stories take their cue was already about social change and the destruction of that which fails to adapt.³³ The destruction is essential, the fortifications always fail and the zombies always break in. That is simply 'what zombies do' – 'In a sense, the zombies are always the real protagonists of the

zombie narrative; no matter how long they have been gone from the action, we are always awaiting their eventual, inevitable return.’³⁴ Canavan argues that:

If Empire, especially in the age of never-ending War on Terror, is essentially an attempt to regulate History, to make the present extend forever in both space and time, then zombie narrative is its dark reflection; as zombies flatten time they obliterate the present alongside the past and the future, only against “us,” not for “us”.³⁵

Then that is the work of divine violence; the obliteration of one order to replace it with what only appears as a void, a dead, silent world, to us – because it is not for us. The zombie apocalypse illustrates that divine violence is a matter of perspective, of an impenetrable inability to see. In it we witness the fantasy of an unjust world obliterated, and nothing more.

Žižek posed two opposite images of divine violence; that of the ‘retaliatory destructive rage’ of the Angel of history, sweeping away the accumulated ‘wreckage’ of ‘progress,’ the ‘growing normalisation of injustice,’ against the ‘unjust... divine caprice’ of the book of Job.³⁶ While his reference to Job is a transition to an argument that attributing meaning to catastrophes, making them ‘acts of god,’ is a mistake to be resisted, and a reminder that a protective, ‘transcendent caretaker’³⁷ God is no viable shelter, it is also a reminder of the terrible, traumatic, unknowable nature of the divine. Žižek quotes Søren Kierkegaard on the nature of Christian love, of a love so high it ‘humanly speaks to a kind of madness,’³⁸ supporting the violence of love, therefore we should not shy away from considering a terrible ambiguity about divine violence. This thing, if it does exist, is both just and monstrous, deserved and undeserved, clean and bloody. The zombie apocalypse is a half point, an indication of our inability to imagine ‘going to the end,’ a phrase Žižek sometimes uses to mean ‘follow to the logical conclusion.’³⁹ It expresses dissatisfaction with what exists but a strange halting, and abrupt failure to imagine anything new. The zombie apocalypse survivor fantasy is essentially a cowardly one, shying away from the trauma of what Žižek calls the ‘the true ethical act.’⁴⁰ While one cannot claim that the Divine Violence explains zombies, zombies explain divine violence. The radical severance of the order of being that the kind of total destruction of divine violence, an erasure without wreckage, cannot be seen from this side, nor can those who could do this thing be recognisable as the same kind of creature as the humans on this side. Whatever end it is that we fail to go to, it is too alien from our present.

Notes

- ¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Žižek!*, documentary, dir. Astra Taylor, 2005 (New York: Hidden Driver Productions, 2005). DVD.
- ² Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 209-210.
- ³ Žižek, *Žižek!*.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 10.
- ⁷ Ibid., 200.
- ⁸ George A. Romero, *Diary of the Dead*, dir. George A. Romero, released 2007 (Santa Monica, CA: Genius Products, 2008), DVD.
- ⁹ Catherine Kellogg, 'Walter Benjamin and the Ethics of Violence', *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 9, No. 1 (2013): 2.
- ¹⁰ A solid overview of scholarly engagements can be found in Ibid.
- ¹¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), 239-240.
- ¹² Ibid., 248.
- ¹³ Ibid., 249.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Žižek, *Violence*, 198-199.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 202.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 199.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 198.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Gerry Canavan, "'We Are the Walking Dead': Race, Time, and Survival in Zombie Narrative", *Extrapolation* 51, No. 3 (2010): 431-453.
- ²² Ibid., 439-440.
- ²³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 52.
- ²⁴ Most memorably in *Night and Dawn of the Dead*, it remains a common trope.
- ²⁵ Canavan, 'We Are the Walking Dead', 445.
- ²⁶ Žižek, *Violence*, 200.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 196.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 201.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid., 200.
- ³² Ibid., 203.

³³ Kyle William Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic: The Rise and Fall (and Rise) of the Walking Dead in Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2010).

³⁴ Canavan, 'We Are the Walking Dead', 445.

³⁵ Ibid., 441.

³⁶ Žižek, *Violence*, 179.

³⁷ Ibid., 180.

³⁸ Quoted in Ibid., 204.

³⁹ A clear example of this phrase is in the opening of Žižek!

⁴⁰ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, 209-210.

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Part 3

Apocalyptic Earth

Lovelock's *Final Warning*: Towards a Typology of Religious Narration of Scientific Climate Change Accounts

Seline Reinhardt

Abstract

In 2009, James Lovelock, father of the Gaia-hypothesis (which proposes a systemic understanding of Earth, envisaging it as a single organism), published his latest book on the ecological threat that our planet faces *vis-à-vis* climate change – according to its apt subtitle a *Final Warning* of the *Vanishing Face of Gaia*. By no means is Lovelock alone in raising awareness for climate change by giving a scientifically informed account of a future with a changed climate. The interface between science and politics as well as the public is of particular interest in this context. Scientists have diagnosed a climatic change and generated prognoses since the second half of the twentieth century. Their scenarios of climate change are far-reaching, seldom intelligible by way of our senses, and, moreover, characterised by a high degree of contingency. Nonetheless, the knowledge and perception of climate change has well expanded from the natural sciences into everyday life. However, this knowledge is, if not broadly all the more strongly, contested. One bone of contention seems to be that scientific accounts of climate change are accompanied by emphatic appeals to act now in order to preserve our planet as a habitat for life as we know it. Thus, these prognoses transgress the boundary of what is implicitly perceived as science's core business – a boundary that is demarcated by science on the one hand and an obscure 'other,' which is frequently 'religion,' on the other. This chapter explores the relationship between climate change science, narration, and religion, and discusses this relationship on the basis of Lovelock's *Final Warning*: is it a narration of 'the End'? Is it as such somehow religious? And, if so: how? Guided by these questions, the author examines the story told in the *Vanishing Face of Gaia* and inquires into the extent of its religiosity in order to develop a typology of religious narration of scientific climate change accounts.

Key Words: Climate change, science, narrativity, religiosity, Lovelock, Gaia.

1. Climate Change, Science, Narrative and Religion: A Brief Introduction

Icons are important to us: the cross, the scimitar, and the hammer-and-sickle have dominated lives and history for two millennia. For some the icon with greatest meaning is that blue-and-white vision of the Earth first seen from space by astronauts.¹

These are the opening lines of *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning*, a book of 2009 on the ecological threat that our planet faces *vis-à-vis* climate change. Its author is James Lovelock, independent scientist and father of the Gaia-hypothesis (the hypothesis that our planet functions systemically, like one single organism). And interesting lines they are, indeed: by identifying the 'blue-and-white vision of the Earth first seen from space' as an 'icon' just like 'the cross,' which, moreover, holds 'greatest meaning' 'for some,' Lovelock's opening is enlaced in the vague presence of something that can be understood as 'religious.'

This apparently strange 'non-scientificity' becomes tangible when we take into consideration a pragmatics-oriented epistemology (such as, for instance, the semiotic of Charles Morris² or the Wittgensteinian-informed theory of Jean-François Lyotard).³ Then, we can state that scientific scenarios, where they press for exemplification, move beyond a strictly scientific rendering. In other words, it is when scientific diagnoses of climate change leave the 'esoteric' community of climate change scientists and are communicated to the 'exoteric,' in the terms of Ludwig Fleck⁴ that they potentially 'turn narrative.'

There is an obverse to this: when scientific accounts of climate change are accompanied by emphatic appeals to act now in order to preserve our planet as a habitat for life as we know it, they can be perceived as transgressions of the boundary of what is implicitly perceived as science's core business. Climate sceptical talk of 'junk science'⁵ gives rise to the tentative hypothesis that it might be this particular circumstance that is responsible for much of the contestation of scientific knowledge of climate change (as well as a certain public *ennui* regarding the topic).⁶

Religion would be heavily involved in this hypothetical intricacy, as the ascription of 'prophet' to prominent climate change-advocates suggests. This title is endowed to James Lovelock,⁷ but also to Al Gore,⁸ conveyor of *An Inconvenient Truth* (first released in 2006) and the *quasi* attorney general for climate change in the eye of the public.⁹ Thus, by no means is Lovelock alone in issuing a warning of and raising awareness of climate change by giving a scientifically informed account of a future with a changed climate.

It cannot be overlooked that the interface between science and politics as well as the public is of particular interest and crucial importance here: Scientists have diagnosed a climatic change and generated prognoses since the second half of the 20th century. Lovelock plays a special role within this context: Although not part of the scientific community that 'discovered' climate change as possibly anthropogenic global warming, Lovelock formulated his hypothesis that the Earth should be regarded systemically, as behaving like one single organism, together with microbiologist Lynn Margulis, around the same time, in the 1970s.¹⁰ Possibly due to this timing, the hypothesis was received very critically in the scientific world.¹¹ Also, the decision to conceptualise the holistic understanding of our planet with the name 'Gaia' might have contributed to the critical initial reception of the

hypothesis – although Lovelock never understood ‘Gaia’ as the Greek goddess but as a concept for understanding Earth as a living organism:

For this purpose the name Gaia is far more suitable for a vast live entity than some dull acronym based on rational scientific terms. In ancient Greece, Gaia was the goddess of the Earth. To many Greeks, she was the most revered goddess of all, and interestingly the only god or goddess that was never the subject of scandal.¹²

Although there are still critical voices, the Gaia hypothesis now has its followers. With the heightened awareness of the intricate globality of climate change it is only natural that Lovelock made climate change increasingly his topic and, *vice versa*, that a ‘Gaian’ understanding of Earth has become common knowledge with regard to climate change.¹³

Lovelock’s *Vanishing Face of Gaia* is ideally suited for the inquiry into the intertwinement of climate change science, narration, and religion. Is it a narrative, an imagination of ‘the End’? And: how is this narrative religious? These are the two questions this chapter examines, before concluding with a typological proposal for the analysis of religiosity in scientifically informed climate change accounts and remarks on implications.

2. Science Fiction? Lovelock’s *Final Warning* as a Narrative

Determining ‘narrative’ is a complicated and much debated issue – all the more after the so-called ‘narrativist turn’ of the late 1960s¹⁴ that broadened its focus and took into perspective the communicative and cognitive dimensions of narrative.¹⁵ Thus, today, narrativity also concerns the dimension of ‘reality narratives’,¹⁶ outside of the literary-fictional¹⁷ – and therefore scientific accounts as well. Here, let us acknowledge rather than discuss the plethora of definitions and restrict ourselves to an operational definition: minimally defined, narrative is ‘[s]omeone telling someone else that something happened,’¹⁸ happens, or will happen.

What is the ‘something’ Lovelock tells us in his *Final Warning*? In an intricate plot that comprises several stories, he also tells of humanity and Gaia – of her *Vanishing Face*. This is the main story, according to the book’s title. We can ‘think of Gaia as if she were an old lady of about [Lovelock’s] age.’¹⁹ This old lady has been our around for ages, seen life become and evolve, and here we are, as part of her.²⁰ Unfortunately, ‘we’ – ‘people, their pets, their livestock’²¹ – have, by now, become too many; our mere existence is too much for Gaia.²² But not only are we too many; our number is particularly critical with regard to a certain lifestyle that is clearly too grand: even if we consider ‘all the other perturbations possible to our self-regulating Earth, we see that the presence of 7 billion people aiming for first world comforts is too much.’²³

Such is the current state of Gaian affairs – that her balance is sensitively disturbed by our sheer number. What are the consequences? According to Lovelock, Gaia is about to ease into a more balanced state.²⁴ Thus, our story, the story of humanity as the second main character in this tale, which is so strongly linked to the protagonist, then, is the one that things will get very uncomfortable very fast,²⁵ and ‘this time we have to take seriously the possibility that global heating may all but eliminate people from Earth.’²⁶ There is little to be done, as our mere existence is the ‘root cause.’²⁷

Nonetheless, Lovelock proposes ‘to act,’ firstly, by seeing Gaia for what she is and consequently by adopting a non-anthropocentric worldview – ‘[t]he ideas that stem from Gaia theory put us in our proper place as part of the Earth system.’²⁸ Seeing her for what she is ‘matters more than any other thing,’²⁹ notwithstanding that the ‘concept of a living Earth is not easy to grasp, even as a metaphor.’³⁰ Furthermore, we can act by preparing for the difficult times to come: in our more proximate future, we will most probably have to fight for the habitable places left on our planet, because as Lovelock has it, ‘[l]ike the foot of an elephant on an ant hill, global heating will crush life from the continental planes.’³¹ Some regions will be spared the worst, but the majority will not.³² Thus, ‘we have to make our lifeboats seaworthy now.’³³

In any case, *we* have to act in our interest, because Gaia will not: ‘[N]ormally the Earth is benign but like ancient Goddesses sometimes ruthless, and only humans are sentimental.’³⁴ Accordingly, Gaia:

does not need saving. *It* can, will, and always has saved itself, and it is now starting to do so by changing into a state much less favorable for us and other animals. What people mean by the plea [“save the planet”] is “save the planet as we know it,” and that is now impossible.³⁵

Therefore, the ‘something’ Lovelock tells us about in his narrative is indeed an imagination of the end, or rather: *an* end – if not to Gaia herself, if not to life itself, then to comfortable life as we know it in developed countries. Thus goes the story of Gaia and how her changes will affect us, as our being affects her. But how is this narrative religious? Possibly because of this treatment of an end?

3. A Tale of the *Next World*? Religiosity in Lovelock's *Final Warning*

To pursue these questions, we have to ask: what is ‘religious’ in the context of narrative? Of course, there is a certain intuitive understanding of what a ‘religious narrative’ is, namely the stories told in the holy scriptures of a religion or belonging to a religion, as not all religions have holy scriptures. But then: what is a ‘religion’? This issue is still strongly debated within religious studies.³⁶

Here, I propose a nominal approach to ‘religion,’ that states what religion is, but in an epistemological rather than an ontological sense. A nominal approach can be developed completely independently or it can, like I suggest here, take the emic understanding of the object of study in question – Lovelock’s own understanding of ‘religion’: with Lovelock, ‘religion,’ for one thing, clearly figures as science’s ‘other.’³⁷ Thus, the pragmatics-oriented epistemology, as mentioned initially, seems affirmed and legitimate for the inquiry into the religiosity of (albeit popular) scientific accounts like Lovelock’s. Concretely, I use Morris’ tripartite semiotic,³⁸ and the three semiotic sub-fields of semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics respectively,³⁹ as heuristic categories to inquire into (A) the content, (B) the form and (C) the use of ‘religious’ narration of scientific climate change accounts such as Lovelock’s *Final Warning*.

(A). Lovelock’s own understanding of ‘religion’ is always implicit, but includes ‘ideology,’ ‘faith,’ and ‘belief system.’⁴⁰ This dimension of ‘religion’ has frequently been theoretically considered within the study of religion. Thoughts offered by Thomas Luckmann, in his pivotal work *Die Unsichtbare Religion* (‘The Invisible Religion’, 1967), are particularly suited for our context: Luckmann famously widened the term ‘religion’ to include more than established religious traditions. To him, religion is apparent everywhere, where humans transcend their biological being in an anthropological-ontological sense, because religion is then sought after to interpret these biological experiences of transcendence and endow them with sense.⁴¹ To fulfil the function of sense-endowment in this regard, religious interpretations develop into ‘symbolically objectified systems of sense’⁴² – which can then be formulated as a ‘holy cosmos.’⁴³

Simultaneously (and possibly due to the religious treatment of transcendent experiences in the biological sense), ‘transcendence’ is a well-known religious metaphor – and one that Lovelock seems to employ as such:

Imagine my delighted amazement on hearing that my wish to see the Earth from space would soon be fulfilled, and I would see from the sky above New Mexico our sphere of a world in all its *glory* [...] and [...] share that *transcendental feeling* of astronauts that our home is not the house or the street or the nation where we live, but the Earth itself.⁴⁴

With these thoughts in mind, we can now ask: where is ‘transcendence’ of one kind or another manifest within Lovelock’s narrative?

For one thing, we can discern a treatment of temporal transcendence in a teleological undertone in Lovelock’s perspective that ‘[n]othing in the universe can be perfect, and humans have so far to go to approach perfection that surely the future is full of promise.’⁴⁵ This is reinforced when Lovelock speaks of us as a ‘partner species in the *great enterprise* of Gaia.’⁴⁶ The goal, the *telos*, seems to be

our mutual survival, or, even more strongly, a perfected – balanced – life. Thus, with the interpretation of the Gaian narrative as a narrative of an end in mind, the ‘transcendent’ moment treated here is the one of death *vis-à-vis* this Life. And it is complicatedly called into question within the Gaian scenario.

I call to mind that Gaia ‘looks after [her]self. All that we can do is try to save ourselves.’⁴⁷ Also, Lovelock assures his readers more than once that extinction is not to be dreaded, only profound hardship for human and Gaian life, for example, when he argues that Gaia’s hot state is ‘uncomfortable but not lethal.’⁴⁸ Simultaneously, however, according to Lovelock, ‘we might become our own executioners and cause the death of Gaia as well.’⁴⁹ Tensions like these indicate the urgency with which this ‘transcendence’ is processed.

In short: even though Lovelock claims that he is ‘glad that [he] ha[s] no notion of [his] own end,’⁵⁰ I think he, as a member of the human species, does nonetheless. Within my framework, it is precisely this notion of our own end that makes his treatment of our species’ and Gaia’s possible end religious by endowing it with sense by implicitly postulating the *telos* of Life: we might die as individuals, but hopefully not as species, and thus, hopefully, extend Gaia’s life to its maximum. That her proper length of life not be endangered by us may even be the germination of the idea of a cosmos whose life is holy – corresponding to Luckmann’s concept of the ‘holy cosmos.’

Accordingly, also a certain spatial ‘transcendence’ can be detected in Lovelock’s *Final Warning*. In this light, our consciousness of Gaia as a living organism – and as our ‘home’ – is part of the treatment of the ‘transcendent’ experience of belonging to a being that encompasses us.⁵¹ Again, there are tensions that suggest difficulties of coming to terms with this experience.

Assuredly, to the end of mutual survival, we are not ‘merely one of the partner species’ at all:

We are not, as the puritans would have it, some wretched species deep in sin. We could have a great and proud future as the people from whom some future Adam and Eve [!] may evolve, progenitors of a species closer to Gaia and which might serve within her as our brains do in each of us.⁵²

Although Lovelock declares us not to be a ‘species deep in sin,’ he continually speaks of ‘the harm’⁵³ we have caused and thus posits a transgressed norm. Therefore, the ‘sense of guilt’ that we should be free from, and that Lovelock accounts as a ‘religious’ feeling elsewhere,⁵⁴ resonates within his own narrative.⁵⁵ So, with its negotiations of both a temporal and spatial ‘transcendence’ on the content-level, the narrative seems to negotiate nothing less than the role we play in the universe and our place in it.

(B). The form of Lovelock's narrative – that carries the telling subtitle *Final Warning* – can also be analysed regarding the temporal 'transcendence' established above: even though there is a lot of talk of 'crisis',⁵⁶ 'disaster',⁵⁷ and 'catastrophe',⁵⁸ there is no mention of the 'apocalypse' or the 'apocalyptic.' Nonetheless, his descriptions of the impending catastrophe form one core of the book that interestingly ends with a chapter entitled *Next World* and a vision of a possible future Gaian civilisation. This bears an undeniable similarity to the Revelation of the New Testament – the prototype of the apocalyptic genre.⁵⁹ There, too, the future is at first grim with the descriptions of the last judgment, but then resolves into the post-catastrophic world reserved for the ones chosen for salvation.⁶⁰ Thus, *The Vanishing Face of Gaia* follows the stricter understanding of apocalypse that encompasses two parts, both the catastrophe and the new world, rather than the softer popular understanding that 'only' envisions catastrophe.

Interestingly, when conceptualising our relationship with Gaia, Lovelock draws heavily upon the semantic field of medicine, thereby not only suggesting Earth's livelihood in agreement with the Gaia theory but making man-made climate change the disease and thus humans the pathogens.⁶¹ Accordingly, Lovelock repeatedly mentions that we have to 'cure' global heating,⁶² and thus save Gaia from her impediment, an 'illness [that] could be called polyanthropoemia, where humans overpopulate until they do more harm than good.'⁶³ This understanding of our relationship also (very) loosely resonates with the Revelation, namely if we interpret her being healed (Latin *salveo*) as a form of rescue – 'salvation' (Latin *salvo*). Moreover, Lovelock is 'not a willing Cassandra',⁶⁴ but, like John before him,⁶⁵ solely a 'messenger',⁶⁶ and we can assume: for Gaia. Thus, also the experience of the spatial 'transcendence' is formally reflected in his book being a *Warning*.⁶⁷

(C.) Finally, with regard to the religious character of the pragmatics of Lovelock's *Final Warning* – its 'religious' use – it is noteworthy that Lovelock himself holds: '[W]e have in all of us a hunger for an ideology or a religion to provide a sense of purpose and wonder when things are good, and reassurance when things are bad.'⁶⁸ Interestingly, all three aspects – purpose, wonder, and reassurance – figure in Lovelock's tale of our future with Gaia. As the impending war to come, according to Lovelock, is a proximate consequence for humanity of Gaia's shift into the hot state, global warming might provide humanity – particularly its younger members – with a 'purpose for living.'⁶⁹ Lovelock similarly claims that the Second World War did this for him.⁷⁰

So, even though '[t]he most frequent response from [his] environmentalist friends to the grim message [in his] last book was [...] [that] [i]t gives us nothing to hope for',⁷¹ and Lovelock belittlingly holds that only 'from some *green hospice* there may come the *anodyne of hope*',⁷² he, too, provides reassurance *qua* hope:

We could have a future in communion [!] with our living planet to make her strong again [...]. Thinking this way, *how could anyone be a pessimist and imagine that the global heating crisis is the end for us or even Gaia?* We will probably both survive and from our descendants could evolve the wiser species that could live even closer to Gaia and perhaps make her the first citizen of our galaxy.⁷³

Indeed this functional dimension of 'religion' resonates with Luckmann's understanding, because to him 'religion' as a 'symbolically objectified system of sense' does more than just generate sense for the individual or a collective of people – it serves as a backdrop for their actions.

But, moreover, embedding us in a sense-endowed (his)story can be regarded as pragmatically religious in the Luckmannian context. Accordingly, Lovelock warns that we might 'cause the *greatest tragedy* in the memory of humankind.'⁷⁴ This diction indicates that even after the 'end of history'⁷⁵ and in the postmodern condition that is characterised by the absence of 'grand narratives' according to Jean-François Lyotard,⁷⁶ climate change discourse might hold new grand narratives in store – surely, I argue, the narrative of *Gaia's Vanishing Face* can be interpreted in this way.

4. Concluding Remarks

(Grand) Narratives of climate change can be examined with regard to their religiosity by inquiring into the negotiation of 'transcendence' with regard to both the future and nature within a semiotic framework that focuses on the 'semantic' content, the 'syntactic' form, and, lastly, the 'pragmatic' use.

Indeed, in my view, not only can scientifically informed climate change accounts be analysed as narratives with a religious twist – they should: We can see more than just superficially employed religious semantics in the climate change-discourse as exemplified here with Lovelock. Indeed, the discourse accordingly analysed indicates that our perception of climate change is heavily involved with and dependent on our notions of 'religion,' 'science,' and 'knowledge' in general, and, not lastly, 'nature' and the 'human.' Particularly the latter, the question of the *anthropos*, seem to be crucial in this context.

Not only is the place and role of the human in the universe negotiated, but our contemporaneity seems particularly special both *of* and *for* this problem of the *anthropos*. To me, this issue is one that is currently far from resolved. This is specifically well reflected in the climate change context: on the one hand (not only) Lovelock's version of environmentalism proclaims, or rather: wishes for, a shift away from anthropocentrism. On the other hand, simultaneously, we declare our current (climactic) age to be the 'anthropocene,'⁷⁷ an age, thus, to which we are very central.

Reflecting upon issues like these is essential for the clarification of our perception of climate change and thus of paramount importance with regard to the enablement of human agency *vis-à-vis* climate change and our (future) environment at peril.

Notes

¹ James Lovelock, *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 1.

² In his *Signs, Language, and Behavior* Morris discerns sixteen different types of discourse according to their mode and use. The scientific discourse is only one among them; see for the scientific discourse, Charles Morris, *Signs, Language, and Behavior* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1946), 126-128.

³ Lyotard distinguishes between scientific knowledge and narrative forms of knowledge as the main 'language games' (Wittgenstein) quintessential to his *Postmodern Condition*; see Jean-François Lyotard, *Das Postmoderne Wissen: Ein Bericht* (Wien: Passagen, 2009), 43-46 (on the language games); 61-70 and 71-78 (for the pragmatics of the narrative and scientific knowledge respectively).

⁴ In his seminal work *Die Entdeckung und Entwicklung einer Wissenschaftlichen Tatsache* (The Discovery and Development of a Scientific Fact), Ludwig Fleck discerns the esoteric from exoteric spheres of science; see Ludwig Fleck, *Die Entdeckung und Entwicklung einer Wissenschaftlichen Tatsache: Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkstilkollektiv* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 138-139.

⁵ For an interesting example see the *Ultimate Global Warming Challenge*: Here the host site junkscience.com [!] sponsors a prize money of \$500,000 for the submission of what they regard a true scientific proof of anthropogenic global warming. See: 'Ultimate Global Warming Challenge', accessed 8 April 2012, <http://ultimatglobalwarmingchallenge.com/>.

⁶ See, for example, the interview with Hans von Storch and Werner Karuass on their latest book *Die Klimafalle Die Gefährliche Nähe von Politik und Klimaforschung* (München: Hanser, 2013); Plüss, Mathias, 'Die Klimafalle', *Das Magazin* 8 (2013): 12-20.

⁷ For example, Jeff Goodell, journalist to *Rolling Stone*, entitled an article of his 'The Prophet of Climate Change: James Lovelock', *Rolling Stone*, 19 October 2007, accessed 24 January 2013, http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/16956300/the_prophet_of_climate_change_james_lovelock.

⁸ See, for example, the blogger Doug L. Hoffmann, 'The Prophet Al Gore, Blessings Be Upon Him', last modified 9 January 2013, accessed 13 April 2013, <http://theresilientearth.com/?q=content/prophet-al-gore-blessings-be-upon-him>.

⁹ Incidentally, Gore, too, invokes the same 'blue-and-white vision of the Earth first seen from space' (immediately after his personal introduction) to take off on his explanations with regard to the workings and implications of climate change. See Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do about It* (Emmaus: Rodale, 2006), 12-13.

¹⁰ For the beginning of Climate Change Science, see e.g., Spencer R. Weart, 'Kurze Geschichte der Entdeckung der Erderwärmung', 2^o. *Das Wetter, der Mensch und Sein Klima*, eds. Petra Lutz and Thomas Macho (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 145. For Lovelock's initial formulation, see Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 159-185, particularly 159-164.

¹¹ As Lovelock himself states: 'So the Gaia concept was born at the peak of the New Age – contemporary with Woodstock and the Beatles, which perhaps accounts for why so many scientists still regard it as part of the plethora of New Age nonsense that was around at the time.' Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 160.

¹² Ibid., 196.

¹³ See, for example, the formulation of the 2001 *Amsterdam Declaration on Global Change*, which opens with the statement that '[t]he Earth System behaves as a single, self-regulating system comprised of physical, chemical, biological and human components.' *The Amsterdam Declaration on Global Change*, Issued at a joint meeting of the International Geosphere Biosphere Programme, the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change, the World Climate Research Programme, and the International Biodiversity Programme. Amsterdam, 2001.

¹⁴ Martin Kreiswirth, 'Merely Telling Stories? Narrative and Knowledge in the Human Sciences'. *Poetics Today* 21, No. 2 (2000): 295.

¹⁵ For an informed cognitivist account of narrative, see: Jerome Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 18, No. 1 (1991): 1-21.

¹⁶ 'Reality narratives' is my rendering of the German *Wirklichkeitserzählungen*, see: Christian Klein and Matias Martinez, 'Wirklichkeitserzählungen. Formen, Felder und Funktionen Nicht-Literarischen Erzählens', *Wirklichkeitserzählungen. Formen, Felder und Funktionen Nicht-Literarischen Erzählens*, eds. Christian Klein and Matias Martinez (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2009), 2-3.

¹⁷ Kreiswirth, 'Merely Telling Stories?', 296.

¹⁸ Ibid., 294.

¹⁹ Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 96.

²⁰ E.g. we are her 'partner species', Ibid., 9.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 63.

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁵ According to Lovelock, the observations he takes into consideration suggest a quicker shift of Gaia and more grave effects of climate change than all the model-based prognoses estimated by the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), the greatest authority on climate change prognoses. Ibid., 10. Consequently, Lovelock hardly ever mentions climate change as ‘global warming,’ but instead – more radically – as ‘global heating’; Ibid., 6, *passim*.

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 9.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

³¹ Ibid., 16.

³² Ibid., 18.

³³ Ibid., 33.

³⁴ Ibid., 227.

³⁵ Ibid., 19.

³⁶ See Michael Bergunder, ‘Was Ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche Überlegungen zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft’, *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 19, No. 1.2 (2011): 3-55.

³⁷ This can be seen by means of implicit juxtapositions of science and ‘religion,’ in several instances where the latter is mentioned explicitly. See, for example, Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 35, 197 and 242.

³⁸ As noted in his work on the *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938).

³⁹ These correspond to the trilateral character of signs: They entertain relations of three kinds. Firstly, signs relate to the signified; secondly, they relate to other signs and thirdly, they relate to their interpreters. See Morris’ *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1938), 6, as cited in Morris, *Signs*, 217.

⁴⁰ Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 242.

⁴¹ Thomas Luckmann, *Die Unsichtbare Religion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991 [1967], 166-171.

⁴² ‘Objectified systems of sense’ is my rendering of Luckmann’s *objektivierte Sinnssysteme*, see, for example, Ibid., 108.

⁴³ In Luckmann’s words: *Heiliger Kosmos*, see, for example, Ibid., 108. When such a system is formulated as a ‘holy cosmos’ and attains a certain degree of durability, possibly passed on over generations, it is then that we encounter religion in its societally anchored form – as institutionalised religious tradition.

⁴⁴ Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 2, my emphases.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 245.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9, my emphasis.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 234.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 88-89.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁵¹ This view is compatible with Lovelock's own understanding of Gaia not as the goddess but as a concept for understanding Earth as a living organism.

⁵² Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 248.

⁵³ Ibid., 5, *passim*; for example, when Lovelock explicitly speaks of 'the harm we have done'. Ibid., 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 231 and 220.

⁵⁵ For example, when he states that the air '*normally, that is before we humans started changing it*, was kept dynamically at a constant composition and one that sustained a habitable climate'. Ibid., 47, my emphasis.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15, *passim*.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 88, *passim*.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 28, *passim*.

⁵⁹ See John J. Collins, 'Apocalypse. An Overview', *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd Edition, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 1 (Detroit: Thomson Gale/Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 409.

⁶⁰ See *The New Jerusalem Revelation*, 21-22.

⁶¹ See, for example, Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 96 or 79.

⁶² Ibid., 68, *passim*.

⁶³ Ibid., 233.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁵ See Revelation e.g. 1, 19: 'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.'

⁶⁶ Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 28.

⁶⁷ The Warning per se is reflected in the Abrahamic genre of the Jeremiad; see as an example for environmentalism Michael Egan, 'Shamans of the Spring: Environmentalism and the New Jeremiad', *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, eds. Karen Dubinsky et al. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), 296-303.

⁶⁸ Lovelock, *Vanishing Face of Gaia*, 242, my emphases.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 92-93.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

⁷² Ibid., 71-72, my emphases.

⁷³ Ibid., 250, my emphases.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 3, my emphasis. Along the same vein, Lovelock appeals to us to 'prove

Garrett Hardin wrong when gloomily he said in 1968 that our condition is truly tragic; for in tragedy there is no escape. We can prove him wrong by surviving.' Ibid., 96.

⁷⁵ Proclaimed most prominently by Francis Fukuyama; see Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

⁷⁶ The term 'anthropocene' was first coined by Paul Crutzen in 2000; see for example, Petra Lutz, '2°. Das Wetter, der Mensch und Sein Klima. Zur Ausstellung', in 2°. *Das Wetter, der Mensch und Sein Klima*, ed. Petra Lutz and Thomas Macho (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 18.

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Weather of Mass Destruction: Forecasting the Future as Climate-Driven War

Stephen Jackson

Abstract

The deeply worrying prospect of a global catastrophe frequently operates as the conceptual backdrop of rhetoric meant to convey the dangers of climate change. In recent years, however, concerns about environmental risks have given rise to more detailed dystopian constructions of a future in which climate change overwhelmingly shapes and propels social conflict. Such forecasts imparting tremendous causal power to climate change are articulated through frightening warnings about impending ‘climate wars,’ ‘climate-driven conflict,’ and other speculation about the potential for widespread lawlessness and violence. Although such warnings are often made by campaigners trying to raise awareness about climate change, their Hobbesian character has also found a receptive audience among defence professionals who perceive climate change as emerging national security threat. Military think tanks, for instance, have been developing scenarios of a future in which climate change produces terrorism, political radicalization, and internationally-destabilising levels of mass human migration. This chapter argues that this climatic turn in defence policy discourse has emerged not only out of the need to (re)legitimate hegemonic power, but also because catastrophic rhetoric about climate change invites such securitized ways of seeing the future. To explore these concerns, I consider the interplay between popular catastrophic rhetoric and the emerging field of ‘climate security.’

Key Words: Catastrophe, climate change, climate security, environmental determinism, dystopia, framing, rhetoric, social collapse, social-nature.

This chapter examines the curious interplay between two speculative practices: scientific projections about the effects of climate change and corresponding projections about how the social world would be catastrophically transformed by such effects. I am particularly concerned with how the attempt to envision the causal power of climate change *over* society appears to invite a foreclosure of human agency in speculation about the future. More specifically, I ask: What contributes the foreclosure of agency in the movement from climate forecasts to social forecasts? And what are some of the consequences of this practice in terms of how social reality is represented?

1. From Climate Projections to Social Projections

Due to its apparent complexity, abstractness, and temporal distance, it is often considered conventional wisdom that the dangers of climate change should be communicated in rich detail. That is, in order to evoke widespread public concern and action, the dangers of climate change should be made to appear more concrete, perceptible, and imminent. As communications scholars Lester and Cottle argue, 'the catastrophic consequences of climate change must be made visible not only to enhance understanding, but also to generate pressure for action.'¹ As a result, the development of such understanding often entails the construction of narratives and images that will enable us to *see* the catastrophic future ahead. This visualising of catastrophe is notable in film documentaries such as *The Age of Stupid*,² *Climate Refugees*,³ and in the BBC documentary as *Hot Planet?*,⁴ which combine footage of present-day disasters and computer-generated imagery to construct representations of a climatically-transformed future. Hence, through this rationale, confronting the dangers of climate change necessitates a kind of awareness-building about the (unmitigated) future.

Informed by this same sense of urgency, there are many examples in both academic and popular literature in which the social consequences of climate change are represented in frightening and apocalyptic terms. James Lovelock, for instance, has suggested that climate change could cause 'civilization [to] degenerate into Dark Ages, with warlords running things.'⁵ Sociologist John Urry sees the likelihood of 'de-civilizing' processes in which '[t]ribal and other wars within countries become increasingly common.'⁶ Fellow sociologist Constance Lever-Tracy echoes this fear, arguing that climate change may 'open the door to chaos and barbarism.'⁷ Writing about the militarisation of climate change, progressive American journalist Christian Parenti warns of 'an emerging geography of climatologically driven civil war, refugee flows, pogroms, and social breakdown.'⁸ And in a 2009 conference at LeedsMet, one peace researcher posed the question: 'What can civilians do when the impact of climate change threatens to provoke violence in their communities?'⁹

Thus, in literature meant to convey how society could be catastrophically affected by climate change, dystopian images of social breakdown, lawlessness, and a failure of modernity are pervasive. Where the looming social consequences of climate change are imagined in detail, there are often depictions of a descent into a Hobbesian world of endless violence and barbarism. Climate change is represented as the defining cause of these transformations, propelling actors and societies into conflict with one another. Climate change *drives* civil war. It *provokes* violence. As a kind of boomerang effect involving the social injection of destabilising changes into the Earth system, that same system now directs its power back, injecting instability and chaos into the social realm, shaping the way human beings behave. Through this, human agency and power are subordinated to the overwhelming force of climate change.

It is, in many regards, through this foreclosure of human agency that the catastrophic framing of climate change acquires so much of its rhetorical power. Insofar as the goal is to persuade audiences of the devastating power of climate change – to shock readers, viewers, and listeners into action – the greater the loss of human agency in such forecasts the better. Undoubtedly, for those of us deeply worried about the dangers of climate change, there is something undeniably compelling about these visions of the future. Still, I wish to encourage a critique of such forecasts, especially regarding how they appeal to scientific projections about the effects of climate change in order to make corresponding projections about the social world.

In exploring these concerns, I wish to cover three points that address the initial questions. The first of these is how climate-based social forecasts borrow on the authority of science, lending an aura of objectivity, factualness, and ideological neutrality to the claims. The second concerns how the very practice of describing conflict as derived from climatic changes has the effect of naturalising the projected problems. This is sometimes facilitated, for instance, by categorising conflicts or people as climate-derived; for example, ‘climate wars’¹⁰ or ‘climate migrants.’¹¹ Such a climate-centred imagining of causality engenders what I refer to as climate-to-conflict narratives in which agency (and responsibility) is conferred to climate change and simultaneously denied to human actors. Thirdly, in contrast to this climate-centred framing, I want to suggest how this could be reframed by considering how the effects of climate change are socially-mediated through the active (re)production social, political, and economic power.

To explore these concerns, I will focus mainly on a professionalised area of catastrophic climate change discourse known as ‘climate security,’¹² a field comprised mainly of political scientists, defence planners, and military think tanks. In securitising global climate risks, their apocalyptic forecasts are rich in detail, providing useful examples of how the social consequences of climate change are being imagined and represented – and, of course, what is also being done with such representations.

2. The Rise of Climate Security

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Defense produced a report speculating about the potential geo-political consequences of climate change. Framing it as emerging national security threat, the authors warn that:

[n]ations with the resources to do so may build virtual fortresses around their countries, preserving resources for themselves.¹³ [...] [F]amine, disease, and weather-related disasters [...] will create a sense of desperation, which is likely to lead to offensive aggression in order to reclaim balance.¹⁴ [...] Humanity would

revert to its norm of constant battles for diminishing resources [...] Once again, warfare would define human life.¹⁵

More recently, the growing field of climate security has sought to establish definitive links between the projected effects of climate change and perceived national security concerns – for example, terrorism, failed states, radicalisation, immigration flows, and so on. Emerging largely from think tanks affiliated with military professionals and intelligence communities, U.S. publications such as *Climate Change and National Security*,¹⁶ *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*,¹⁷ *Climate Cataclysm*,¹⁸ *National Security Implications of Climate Change for U.S. Naval Forces*¹⁹ all draw on apocalyptic and dystopian scenarios about the future to impress on their readers that climate change will become the defining feature of geo-political conflict. Echoing this climatic turn in national security rhetoric, the U.S. DoD's 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review* argues that climate change will 'shape the operating environment, roles and missions that [military forces] undertake',²⁰ acting as an 'accelerant of instability'.²¹ In constructing scenarios to depict this future, analysts use the authority of climate models to forecast social, political, and cultural changes. As one D.C.-based military think tank asserts, such scenarios are meant to estimate '*What potential climate-driven outcomes are plausible, given current scientific understanding* [original emphasis].'²²

One example of such possible outcomes is illustrated by a scenario in which environmental changes such as droughts and flooding trigger a chain of events, beginning with the forced migration of millions of people from the global South to the North, ending with the collapse of liberal pluralism and tolerance. The scenario warns that 'There will be political tipping points marked by the collapse of liberal concepts of openness, in the face of public demands for action to stem the tide [of immigration].'²³

Further on, it is warned that there would likely be an increase in:

religious fervor, perhaps even a dramatic rise in millennial end-of-days cults; hostility and violence toward migrants and minority groups, at a time of demographic change and increased global migration; and [and increase in] intra- and interstate conflicts over resources, particularly food and fresh water.²⁴

They also suggest that the conditions in these scenarios are an impending reality, stating: 'The scientific evidence is clear that we will see effects at least as dramatic as those we outline here.'²⁵ In this rationale, the forecasts are not simply *constructions* of the future, but rather the *recognition* of a future waiting to happen. Through this confidence in the predictive power of science to reveal future social problems, the availability of agency is tremendously diminished. And the sense

that such problems are inevitable is made all the more pronounced through frequent use of the modal verb ‘will,’ rather than ‘could’ or ‘would.’

3. Scientisation of Climate-to-Conflict Narratives

The idea that the scientific knowledge of climate change can serve as a basis for estimating social transformations in the future is legitimated by a growing body of academic work that attempts to turn such forecasting into a science of its own. Typically, this involves treating climate change as an independent variable; or, in the words of one national security scholar, as a ‘hypervariable.’²⁶ Tasked with estimating the effect of climate change on migration, for instance, a 2011 U.S. government-funded project attempts to ‘[isolate] the climate effect – which may have only been secondary – from other drivers of historical migration to provide a basis for the estimation of future international immigration flows.’²⁷ Another study warns of ‘an additional 390,000 battle deaths’²⁸ in Africa by 2030 because of climate change. And Mathew Ranson, a Harvard-based public policy analyst, provides a striking example of how detailed and far-reaching such forecasts can become. Operating on the assertion that ‘weather has a strong causal effect on the incidence of criminal activity,’²⁹ he applies statistical methods to predict increases in crime for the remaining decades of the 21st century. He concludes:

[C]limate change will cause an additional 30,000 murders, 200,000 cases of rape, 1.4 million aggravated assaults, 2.2 million simple assaults, 400,000 robberies, 3.2 million burglaries, 3.0 million cases of larceny, and 1.3 million cases of vehicle theft in the United States.³⁰

Thus, a distinction is posited between presumably normal levels of conflict (i.e. violent crime) and an ‘additional’ quantity produced by climate change.

Criticising such claims as new form of environmental determinism, climatologist Mike Hulme sees this as evidence of what he calls ‘epistemological slippage,’³¹ in which the authority of science and climate modelling is unjustifiably transferred to claims about social and political possibilities. Hulme states:

Because of the epistemological authority over the future claimed, either implicitly or explicitly, by such modelling activities, climate becomes the one “known” variable in an otherwise unknowable future. The openness, contingency, and multiple possibilities of the future are closed off as these predicted virtual climates assert their influence over everything from future ecology, economic activity, and social mobility to human behavior, cultural evolution, and geosecurity.³²

In this regard, the alignment of scientific knowledge with forecasts about climatically-driven social conflict appears to endow such predictions with an aura of objectivity and ideological neutrality. The projected social conflicts are effectively scientised and come to develop their own semblance of factualness. Hence, the projected social transformations – i.e. increased levels of conflict – become looming realities, much in the way that projected temperature increases are looming realities. Such a quasi-scientific framing of complex social phenomena is evident, for instance, in climate security titles like *Rising Temperatures, Rising Tensions*.³³ Indeed, the assertion that human aggression invariably increases as temperatures increase continues to inform the way potential climate risks are framed in academic and popular discourse, encouraging the perception of climate change as a national security issue.³⁴ Such one-to-one movements – or ‘slippages’ – from climate projections to social projections foreclose human agency by implying that under certain environmental conditions, particular forms of human behaviour are virtually unavoidable.

4. Seeing Social Problems through a ‘Climate Lens’

This scientised approach to speculation about the future also allows nature to be represented as an overriding agency, placing climatic and other environmental forces at the *centre* of the framing of conflict and human suffering. This effectively naturalises the projected problems, insofar as social conflicts come to be discussed primarily for how they are indicative of the effects of climate change.

A good example of this naturalising – or, perhaps, climatizing – of conflict can be seen in the numerous terms coined in recent years that (re)categorise social and political processes or events as climate-derived. One notable example is how recent conflicts in Darfur and Kenya have been cited as evidence of ‘climate wars.’³⁵ And sifting through literature from NGOs, climate campaigners, political scientists, and international bodies like the UN, it is not uncommon to find people and social processes categorised for how they are subordinated to the power of climate change; for instance, references to ‘climate-driven migration,’³⁶ ‘climate migrants,’³⁷ ‘climate-refugees,’³⁸ and ‘climate-induced conflict.’³⁹ UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon applied a similar climate-based categorising of human suffering when referring to ‘victims of climate change.’⁴⁰ And Christian Parenti refers to ‘drought-fueled violence,’⁴¹ ‘drought rebels,’⁴² and ‘climate fascism.’⁴³

The problem I wish to underscore here is that it is unclear when it becomes appropriate to place people into climate-categories. At what point, for instance, do we begin classifying problems primarily as climate-related, as opposed to, say, politically- or economically-related? And what are the implications of doing so?

Such questions point to what discourse analysts sometimes refer to as a ‘framing’ problem, in which the highlighting of certain issues or realities simultaneously – if inadvertently – marginalises others. Framing, as Jim Kuypers explains it, is:

the process whereby communicators act – consciously or not – to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more or less noticeable (even ignored) than others.⁴⁴

In emphasising the power climate change has to influence or produce social conflict, conflicts are – to varying degrees – redefined as climate problems. Within a climate-to-conflict framework, locating and describing how or where climate change has power over social actors is paramount. And as the effects of climate change are foregrounded in explanations for social conflicts, the mediating human agency essential to them is driven into the background. Thus, the reduction of complex social phenomena to environmentally-based categories stems from trying to view and represent social problems through a ‘climate lens,’⁴⁵ to borrow a metaphor the World Bank has recently coined to frame its policy-making.

5. Seeing Climate Change through a Social Lens

None of this is to deny that environmental forces have a role in social conflict. However, the problem I wish to highlight is that the practice of apprehending climate change’s causal power *on* or *over* society and human actors has a particular effect on the way social realities are represented. The fixation on trying to isolate and represent how climate change can *produce* changes in the social world promotes a narrative in which existing social, economic and political practices (and injustices) are frozen, rendered as taken-for-granted conditions or states that merely exist. Climate change is then cast as the primary agent or antagonist that ‘impacts’ on everything from terrorism and crime to poverty and nutrition.

One online UN factsheet provides a useful illustration of this impact-based framing of the relationship between climate change and social problems, stating that the:

[i]mpacts of climate change are expected to exacerbate poverty and inequalities. [Such] social impacts will vary, depending on factors like age, socio-economic class, occupation, and gender. The world’s poorest inhabitants will be worst affected.⁴⁶

Despite the compelling sense of urgency this conveys, such a climate-centred framework also obscures the way in which so-called ‘impacts’ are in fact co-productions of power relations and global political economic policies that place human beings at risk. In other words, climate-to-conflict narratives obscure the fact that those actors ‘impacted’ on or ‘victimised’ by climate change have had their agency and power denied to them not so much by climate change but rather by *other people*. The effects of climate change, then, do not impact on social actors, but are instead *mediated* by them.

To clarify, in contrast to seeing social problems through a ‘climate lens,’ we could instead turn this the other way and try to see the dangers of climate change through a *social lens*. From this perspective, what the dangers of climate change make manifest is not simply that doing nothing to mitigate climate change imperils people, but rather that the reproduction of the status quo imperils them. In other words, ‘more people will starve’⁴⁷ to the extent that ongoing social, political, and economic injustices have not been redressed – i.e. a lack of entitlements to food⁴⁸ – not because of climate change as such. It is not, therefore, that the effects of climate change that *exacerbate social problems*, but rather the active (re)production of social relations, inequalities, and injustices which *exacerbate the effects of climate change*.

To illustrate this point, if we re-articulated the above UN statement as a question it would be: ‘How could the effects of climate change exacerbate poverty?’ To contrast from a more socially-mediated framework, however, we would re-frame this by asking: ‘How could the social, political, and economic practices that produce poverty exacerbate the effects of climate change?’

This is not meant as an alternative to climate-to-conflict narratives. Rather, it is a suggestion for (re)framing the risks of climate change in a way that emphasises how they are contingent upon human agency. Developing an awareness of the dangers of climate change does not require that we envision a future where human agency and power are lost to the whims of the natural environment. It is, in fact, precisely human agency and power on which the social consequences of climate change – and our hopes of mitigating or adapting to it – depend.

Notes

¹ E. A. Lester and Simon Cottle, ‘Visualizing Climate Change: Television News and Ecological Citizenship’, *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 920.

² Franny Armstrong, *The Age of Stupid*, dir. Franny Armstrong (London: Dogwoof Pictures, 2009), DVD.

³ Michael P. Nash, *Climate Refugees*, dir. Michael P. Nash (Beverly Hills: LA Think Tank, 2010), DVD.

⁴ *Hot Planet?*, dir. Judy Evans (London: BBC One; 2010), television programme.

⁵ Jeff Goodell, ‘The Prophet of Climate Change: James Lovelock’, *Rolling Stone*, 19 October 2007, accessed 14 December 2012,

<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/blogs/national-affairs/the-prophet-of-climate-change-james-lovelock-20071019>.

⁶ John Urry, *Climate Change and Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 149.

⁷ Constance Lever-Tracy, ‘Global Warming and Sociology’, *Current Sociology* 56, No. 3 (2008): 452.

⁸ Christian Parenti, *The Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2011), 10.

⁹ Rachel Julian, 'What Can Civilians Do When the Impact of Climate Change Threatens to Provoke Violence in Their Communities?' (presentation, Securing the State: Securing the Corporate Nexus: The Coming Militarization of Climate Change. Leeds Metropolitan University, 27 November 2009).

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¹¹ Fiona Harvey, 'More Than 30 Million Climate Migrants in Asia in 2010, Report Finds', *The Guardian*, 19 September 2011, accessed 10 October 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/sep/19/climate-migrants-asia2010#history-link-box>.

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¹³ Peter Schwartz and Doug Randall, *An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for United States National Security* (U.S. Department of Defence, Office of Net Assessment, Washington D.C., 2003), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁶ Joshua W. Busby, *Climate Change and National Security: An Agenda for Action* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2007).

¹⁷ CNA Corporation. *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2007).

¹⁸ Kurt M. Campbell, ed. *Climatic Cataclysm: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Climate Change* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Committee on National Security Implications of Climate Change for U.S. Naval Forces, *National Security Implications of Climate Change for US Naval Forces* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2011).

²⁰ United States Department of Defense. *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense 2010), 84.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²² Kurt M. Campbell et al., *The Age of Consequences: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Global Climate Change* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007), 35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁵ Ibid., 69.

²⁶ Paul J. Smith 'Climate Change, Mass Migration and the Military Response', *Orbis* 51, No. 4 (2007): 632.

²⁷ Shuaizhang Feng et al., 'Linkages among Climate Change, Crop Yields and Mexico–Us Cross-Border Migration', *PNAS* 107, No. 32 (2010): 14257.

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³⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

³¹ Mike Hulme, 'Reducing the Future to Climate: A Story of Climate Determinism and Reductionism', *Osiris* 26, No. 1 (2011): 249.

³² Ibid.

³³ Oli Brown and Alec Crawford, *Rising Temperatures, Rising Tensions: Climate Change and the Risk of Violent Conflict in the Middle East* (Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2009).

³⁴ Solomon M. Hsiang et al., 'Quantifying the Influence of Climate on Human Conflict', *Science* 341, No. 6151 (2013): 1-21, accessed 13 September 2013, <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/early/2013/07/31/science.1235367/suppl/DC1>; John Vidal, 'How Climate Change Can Make Us Hot under the Collar', *The Guardian* 2 August 2013, accessed 3 August 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/poverty-matters/2013/aug/02/climate-change-violence>.

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Bank, 2009).

⁴⁰ Ban Ki Moon, 'Hear the First Victims of Climate Change', *The New York Times*, 4 June 2007, accessed 15 August 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/04/opinion/04iht-edban.1.5987017.html>.

⁴¹ Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos*, 52.

⁴² Ibid., 133.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Jim A. Kuypers,, 'Framing Analysis', in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, ed. Jim A. Kuypers (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 182.

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Myths of the End and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

Hatice Yurttas

Abstract

In *The Stone Gods* (2007), Jeanette Winterson creates a subject position that defies humanism by getting rid of the body and biology completely by creating the character Spike, a robo sapiens who presents herself as a woman that decides to be a lesbian later on. This robo sapiens, detached from its body at the end, provides an interesting position to discuss the deconstructionist and feminist critique of the subject and gender. I will argue that, despite its radical divergence from the subject of humanism, this subjectivity is actually embedded in the religious and humanist conception of the subject, which is revealed in the apocalyptic pattern of the novel. This apocalyptic pattern and the logic of ending is in accordance with the Biblical apocalyptic pattern which also encompasses the rational perception of apocalypse which defines the discourse of global warming. An analysis of the apocalyptic philosophy of the Bible will show that the intelligible and rational world view dominates both religious and secular writings such as *The Stone Gods*, and this world view implies a certain subjectivity that this apocalyptic vision can accommodate. This subjectivity is a complete entity that has free will defined in its difference from and in relation to others – human, animal or divine – and this difference and relation is what constitutes the subject of humanism. This humanist subject is in opposition to the subject of change and shape-shifting of mythology or pre-monotheistic religions as illustrated in Joseph Campbell's study of Oriental mythologies and in Mikhail Bakhtin's study on the carnivalesque. In other words, the narration of apocalypse that marks the end of time and follows a rational logic of reward and punishment as featured in *The Stone Gods* inheres a certain understanding of subject that cannot diverge much from the male humanist subject, which is the case regarding the character of Spike.

Key Words: Apocalypse, religion, mythology, rationality, subjectivity, feminism, deconstruction, carnivalesque, gothic realism.

Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*¹ offers a subject position that defies humanism by completely getting rid of the body and biology by creating the character Spike, a robo sapiens who presents herself as a woman that decides to be a lesbian later on. At first glance, this character seems to be a promising alternative mode of subjectivity in accordance with the deconstructionist and feminist critique of the subject. However, the apocalyptic pattern in the novel, alongside the ideology of progress and rationalism that is woven into this pattern in the text reveals this subject to be too enmeshed in humanism. This apocalyptic pattern is in

accordance with the Biblical apocalyptic model which can also be discerned in the rational understanding of apocalyptic discourses such as the one on global warming. An analysis of the apocalyptic philosophy of the Bible will show that the religious apocalyptic pattern is not very different from the rational world view, as it dominates secular writings such as *The Stone Gods*. This apocalyptic narrative incorporates a certain subjectivity that is necessarily one of free will and autonomy; a completed entity defined in its constitutive difference from and in relation to others – human, animal or divine. An alternative to this subjectivity, however, can be found in mythology or pre-monotheistic religions as explored in Joseph Campbell's study of Oriental mythologies and Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque where we see a subject of change and shape-shifting. The configuration of apocalypse as one that marks the end of time and follows a comprehensible logic of reward and punishment embodies a certain understanding of subject that cannot diverge much from the male humanist subject, which is the case for Spike. Campbell and Bakhtin's studies on different conceptions of the individual illustrate how Spike, who recalls Donna Haraway's cyborg position that she designates as a theorised, non-naturalist hybrid of machine and organism for an alternative politics and epistemology, is actually encoded within the existing subjectivity despite the novel's articulate claims to deconstruct the male subjectivity.²

The Stone Gods tells the story of humanity in three phases of history on different planets repeating the same mistakes that result in the same destruction befalling humanity each time. From the Easter Islands in the seventeenth century, when the inhabitants deplete the island's forest for the ancient god rituals, to the hi-tech post-apocalyptic world of the planet Orbus, human beings repeat the same self-destructive acts that bring about the doom of the planet. This recurring pattern is based on certain assumptions concordant with both the apocalyptic visions of the Bible and the Enlightenment rationality as reflected in the theories of global warming. The novel opens with the hopeful and exciting discovery of a brand new planet, Planet Blue, which eventually turns out to be Earth, by the inhabitants of Orbus, where robots do almost all jobs, meat is cloned in labs, and DNA-fixing promises eternal youth. Behind this facade of technological advances and genetic engineering, however, is a dying planet of life-threatening red dust storms that signal the end of the planet in fifty years, and an oppressive corporate state. The subversive scientist Billie Crusoe's³ summary of the situation in the interview she gives to a television channel on the discovery of Planet Blue illustrates the novel's visions of not only the apocalypse but also of the individual:

But we have taken a few wrong turnings. Made a few mistakes.
We have limited natural resources at our disposal, and a rising
population that is by no means in agreement as to how our world

as a whole should share out these remaining resources. Conflict is likely.⁴

This scenario of the end of the world is familiar enough as it reverberates with the environmentalist global warming scenarios, which claim that the end of the world is coming because of our wrongdoings, and argue that humanity has the power to change this course. This scenario is based on two problematic assumptions. One assumption is that there is an 'end' to the world, which is very much disputable as we first need to establish what constitutes the end. Since the matter does not vanish and always transforms into another matter, we can only talk about the planet's transformation into another state whether hostile to human life or not, rather than an absolute end. Another questionable assumption is that ends are explicable, rational and under our control. This apocalyptic narrative presumes that the world has got a beginning which has evolved into its final and complete state today, which we can and have to maintain. The history of the earth, however, tells a different story that resists this model of development. This progressive view of the planet rejects the ever-changing quality of the universe and Earth by imposing a false perfection and completion on the planet. The naive belief that if human beings do not interfere with the ecological balance of the earth, this perfect blissful state will continue forever ignores the fact that the Earth and the universe has always been changing. The present state and climate is neither the final nor the ideal state of the earth. There have been five major ice ages so far and we are still in the interglacial period of the fifth ice age that began 2.6 million years ago, the last glacial advance ending about 10,000 years ago, making agriculture possible. Moreover, many scientists believe that the pattern of the ice ages so far signals to the coming of another glacial period.⁵ This tells us that there is no evidence to suggest that the current state of the earth is the ideal state that the earth has been moving towards since its formation. Ice ages began and ended when humankind populated very little of the earth. Although the exact reasons are unknown, scientific speculations on the causes of the previous glacial retreats are changes in the earth's orbit, the motion of tectonic plates, large meteorites, atmospheric composition and volcanisms.⁶ Moreover, whether the earth ends up as a desert or snowball planet in the future, of which the latter is more likely considering the history of ice ages,⁷ we cannot call this an apocalypse proper for all life forms since these periods produce species fit for the particular climate. Another fact that invalidates this environmentalist view is that the sun has got only a few million years left before it will burn out, expand and make the earth uninhabitable.⁸ Then, the mistakes we have been repeating, as Winterson argues, have neither been the cause for the retreat of the ice sheets and the changes in the climate, nor for the end of the planet.

Our belief in our power to bring about the doom of the world despite our limited control over the universe shows the extent to which we believe in our

importance and centrality in the universe. The deconstruction of the subject, then, fails here when it re-enacts the myth of the subject in control of itself and the world claiming the capability of correcting all the wrongs on the planet. This, of course, does not mean that human intervention and pollution has no effect on the planet or we can happily continue to use plastic bags. This perspective should show that undoing the binaries, as Winterson suggests in one of the novel's mottos, 'Forget the binaries,'⁹ requires a change in the environmentalist consciousness to figure out a new logic to regulate human activity on Earth as Greg Garrard suggests.¹⁰ In this misconception of the relation of the human to the planet, the nature/culture binary is kept intact and nature is objectified. Donna Haraway argues that feminists' estrangement from science as a reaction to the employment of science and biology by patriarchal, oppressive ideologies has left life sciences uncontested by feminists.¹¹ We do not have the knowledge and studies that can provide alternative views of nature and biology as feminists have given up the opportunity to intervene in the production of this kind of knowledge. This withdrawal from natural sciences also reinforced the opposition between social sciences and natural sciences, which again contributed to the objectification of nature. Although Winterson is not hopeful about the potential for endings to produce new beginnings, as the novel argues that the end is only the beginning of the repetition of the previous destructive cycle, I do not think that she deconstructs the myth of apocalypse as Hope Jennings suggests.¹² Despite the lack of consolation and revelation at the end, as the common interpretation of the myth of apocalypse goes, the pattern in *The Stone Gods* re-enacts the humanist ideal keeping the culture/nature hierarchy intact and controlled by the all-knowing male subject.¹³

This deterministic world view built around a central all-powerful and responsible subject also resonates with the common interpretation of the apocalyptic narratives in the Bible. The idea of apocalypse is mostly derived from the Biblical model but this reliance on the Bible is contingent on a biased reading of the text. Despite the common interpretation of the text, the Bible does not actually present a coherent pattern with a clear beginning and a move towards an ultimate end that will see the inception of a new order. This is despite Frank Kermode's sweeping conclusion that:

The Bible is a familiar model of history. It begins at the beginning ("In the beginning ...") and ends with a vision of the end ("Even so, come, Lord Jesus"); the first book is Genesis, the last Apocalypse.¹⁴

In fact, I argue, the Bible does not yield to this kind of reading. In a similar vein, Teresa Heffernan assumes that the apocalyptic narratives are rooted in the Christian apocalypse, which has produced the secular fundamental narratives of the Enlightenment, the Nation, History and humanity which offer a sense of continuity,

purpose and meaning to existence in a parallel way to the religious narrative of apocalypse.¹⁵ These conclusions rather reflect our need for comprehensible beginnings and ends, which is, as Kermode argues, an essential human need, and which, I believe, should be located within the specific historical philosophical era.¹⁶ Putting aside the fact that the order of the books in the Bible and the canon varies and is not undisputed among Christians and Jews, a secular reading of the Bible makes one wary of such simplistic conclusions. In the Old Testament's visions, destruction comes as a punishment to those who do not obey god's commands. The end of the world is not a predesigned end but one that comes as a result of sacrileges as the first mention of the end of the world, Noah's story, for example, illustrates. The flood that ends the world and brings about a new one is retribution for humankind's wrongdoing and disrespect for god.¹⁷ After this first apocalypse, the tension between god and his people continues because people revert to polytheistic religions and worship other gods. The descriptions of the day when the non-believers will be punished appear not only in Daniel but in many other places.¹⁸ The judgment day that will initiate a new beginning gains a central place only in Matthew, with the narration of Jesus Christ's life; yet, it is still possible to interpret this 'kingdom of heaven'¹⁹ as the victory of the sons of Israel over pagans. I am aware that the reading I offer here is prone to what Kermode criticises as taking the language of the Bible 'literally',²⁰ but I would call this kind of approach secular as it diverges from the religious dogma. This literal or secular reading reveals the Bible as a record of history or mythology that can be regarded as an alternative source of historical knowledge. I suggest that the text yields itself to this interpretation more with its repeated references to itself as 'the book of life',²¹ in Revelation for example, that records who is to be punished and who is to be rewarded when victory is won. Taking up this perspective, the coherent narrative of an inevitable apocalypse will be seen as the reflection of our own schemata; the result of our need for absolute ends to make sense of our existence.

In addition to promoting a problematic progressive linear course for the planet's chaotic and unpredictable existence, these two secular narratives – the dystopian and global warming – and religious narratives conform to the subject of humanism, offering a responsible individual of free will in control of the world. This subjectivity defines a certain era in human history whereas we can see alternative configurations of subjectivity at different moments in history. Bakhtin's study on Rabelais and Renaissance literature, for instance, reveals a divergent subjectivity within the folk culture of medieval times. The folk culture and the carnivalesque elements that identify this culture consist of a different view of life in which the body, time, objects and life have different borders than the classical or rational view conjectures. Emphasising carnival's broad reference to an outlook on life rather than an organised, spatially and temporally limited event, Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque characterises the folk culture that is accentuated by the combination of humour with philosophy, the comic with the tragic, where the

material bodily principle shows itself in a certain idiom of symbols and imagery to merge these oppositions. Constituting the grotesque realism of medieval times are the images of the body conceived as an entity that comes to life, grows up, ages, defecates, copulates, and dies. What emerges in these images is a different body politic within a cyclical conception of time in which death and life are phases of one continuous cycle. In Enlightenment rationality, the peak of the official and also the ecclesiastical ideology, the being is defined as a completed, finished existence distinguished with clear boundaries from other beings – animal, vegetable and human. This relation is based on oppositional and exclusive relations between death and life, or humankind and god, for example, within a progressive linear perception of time. On the other hand, the folk humour highlights an incomplete, becoming being with an organic relation to other beings and divinity; a being, moreover, that can become divine as well. These images of the totality of the body overrule oppositions between the body and soul, abstract and concrete, immanent and transcendent. In this way, the imagery of grotesque realism revokes abstract ideas and salvation through the rejection of the body. With their ageing, dying, desiring, eating bodies, the subjects deconstruct the abstract ideals and transcendence of the bodily existence, bringing everything down to earth, literally.²²

In addition to the alternative insight into subjectivity that can be gathered from Bakhtin's study on folk culture, Joseph Campbell's study on Oriental mythologies also offers a new modality to discuss the deconstruction of the subject. According to Campbell, the individual in Eastern mythologies is incongruous with the individual in the monotheistic religions that draw on the autonomous individual of free will.²³ Eastern mythologies envisage the individual as part of the cosmic realm, and not as a completed and differentiated being. The subjectivity is a position that can be taken up by many individuals as the generic names for multiple kings, for instance, illustrates. The divine character of the Pharaoh and other kings makes the distinction between god and human inapplicable to Eastern philosophy.²⁴ Indeed, Campbell argues that the separation of god and humanity marks an important moment in history that enabled the narratives of fall, progress and conflict between opposing powers.²⁵ Another point of difference between Eastern and Western religions is that in Eastern mythologies, the good and the bad, life and death, are not perceived as oppositional, dissonant categories; they are instead part of a cosmic order that relies on both. The goddess of fertility is also the goddess of the underworld; as Campbell says, the ancient people of ancient religions buried the dead as they buried the seeds in the earth.²⁶ The subject contained in this philosophy, then, is not one that can be positioned in opposition to the world nor can it be held responsible for the cosmic order to which it is not only submitted but also organically attached. This individual is one of transformation and becoming, which resonates well with the idea of the individual articulated in

Bakhtin's argument on folk culture. This mode of being is not only an embodied being but also one whose body is also the universal body of god.

Thus, these two models are outside the binaries on which Western philosophy is built,²⁷ and suggest an alternative to the abstract, disembodied, rational subject of humanism and monotheistic religion that we also find in the robot, Spike. Of course, on one level, *The Stone Gods* dismantles the rational determinist world view and at times steps out of this determinism to make a foray into unpredictable territories, as another of the novel's mottos articulates: 'A quantum universe, neither random nor determined. It is potential at every second. All you can do is to intervene.'²⁸ Randomness plays a role in the novel as well. Billie spontaneously decides to extend their walk in the gardens of the MORE-future company upon seeing the gate open, for example. Billie and Spike's escape from the Tech City and their entrance into the Wreck city triggers the events that result in Billie being shot by MORE-security when she is running away, leaving Spike to a whole new future with her teenage lesbian lover in the alternative community in the Wreck City. The evolution of the magnificent robo sapiens to learn to love against her programming is also a shift from the deterministic view of life. However, this is also indicative of the binary of rational thinking and emotions. On the one hand, Spike represents a dissident, alternative path by deconstructing the robot and the human, which Donna Haraway calls the cyborg subjectivity that can accommodate the oppositions such as nature and culture, human and animal, human and robot, and become a contested, illegitimate, denaturalised epistemological position.²⁹ Yet, the denial of bodily existence, which keeps the dichotomy of the body and the mind intact and reinforces the ideology of the rational individual confirms the humanism that creates subjectivities within violent hierarchies.

Notes

¹ Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

² Donna J. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 149-181.

³ *The Stone Gods* makes many allusions to *Robinson Crusoe* in addition to many other works. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin, 1985). This intertextuality is employed to strengthen the argument that human beings have been repeating the same mistakes in various forms in different phases of history.

⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, 5.

⁵ Doug Macdougall, *Why Geology Matters: Decoding the Past, Anticipating the Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 147-167. See Donald Rapp for a detailed explanation of why the future of the climate cannot be established for certain in addition to his discussion of how political and economic

interests are involved in global warming scenarios. Donald Rapp, *Ice Ages and Interglacials: Measurement, Interpretations, and Models*, 2nd Edition (Berlin: Springer, 2012), 327-375. Donald Rapp identifies four glacial periods. Donald Rapp, *Assessing Climate Change: Temperatures, Solar Radiation, and Heat Balance* (Berlin: Springer, 2008), 12 and 18-39.

⁶ Wikipedia contributors, 'Ice Age', *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed 8 May 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice_ages, and Donald Rapp, *Ice Ages and Interglacials*, 17- 21 and 215-245.

⁷ This is a more likely scenario. Maggie Gee's 1998 novel, *The Ice People* (London: Telegram, 1998) takes this clue and tells the story of a future ice age, when the ice begins to advance again.

⁸ Wikipedia contributors, 'The Sun', *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, accessed 8 May 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_sun, and Martin Beech, *Rejuvenating the Sun and Avoiding Other Global Catastrophes* (New York: Springer, 2008), 8 and 23-60.

⁹ Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, 153.

¹⁰ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 107. Although Hope Jennings quotes Garrard's suggestion that the world may not be ending, she does not dwell on the implications of this in regard to the problematic environmentalist view in *The Stone Gods*. Hope Jennings, 'A Repeating World: Redeeming the Past and Future in the Utopian Dystopia of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*', *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 27, No. 2 (2010): 135.

¹¹ Donna J. Haraway, 'Animal Sociology and a Natural Economy of the Body Politic: A Political Physiology of Dominance', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 8-9.

¹² Jennings, 'A Repeating World', 132-146.

¹³ This misconception in regard to culture and nature opposition appears in many science fiction novels. Margaret Atwood's *The Year of The Flood* (London: Virago, 2010); Doris Lessing's *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), and Maggie Gee's *The Flood* (London: SAQI, 2005) are some of the novels that are based on a false belief in humanity's exaggerated power over nature.

¹⁴ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 6.

¹⁵ Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture Modernism, Postmodernism and the Twentieth Century Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 4-5.

¹⁶ David Leigh's search of apocalyptic patterns in the Eastern mythologies such as the myth of Rudra and Hindoo myths Bhagavad Gita is a similar gesture. He realises that the latter does not have a proper apocalyptic pattern but still reads the cyclic pattern in Rudra as apocalyptic whereas transformation from good to bad

and vice versa, and the repetition of beginnings prevail in this story. David J. Leigh, *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 7-8.

¹⁷ Genesis 5:8 (Authorized (King James) Version).

¹⁸ Some of the references to ends can be seen in Dan; Ezek; Hosea (AV).

¹⁹ Matt 3:2 (AV)

²⁰ Frank Kermode argues for an interpretation of the Bible based on the figurative use of language. Frank Kermode. *The Sense of an Ending*, 8.

²¹ See Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 (AV).

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

²³ Bakhtin suggests that this folk culture is rooted in pagan rituals. This implies that this culture is related to polytheistic religions that have been suppressed by monotheistic religions. This connects the subjects in Bakhtin and Joseph Campbell. *Rabelais and His World*, 8. Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythologies* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

²⁴ Joseph Campbell, *Oriental Mythologies*, 130.

²⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

²⁶ Ibid., 149.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida's seminal work on Western philosophy, initially in *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), analyses Western philosophy's reliance on binary oppositions within the linguistic system.

²⁸ Winterson, *The Stone Gods*, 75.

²⁹ Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 149-181.

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Part 4

Religious Notions of the Apocalypse

Printed Representations of Catholic and Protestant Martyrdom in Tudor England, 1530-1600

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Abstract

My PhD thesis, supervised by Doctors Silvia Evangelisti and Jessica Sharkey, provides the first in-depth comparison between Tudor-era Catholic and Protestant martyrs in England since the research of Patrick McGrath, Jack Scarisbrick and Arthur Dickens during the 1960s. This brief chapter will analyse Catholic and Protestant concepts of divine retribution – especially supernatural miracles, omens and prophecies, which could be used by propagandists either to highlight a martyr's piety, or attack rival religious groups as obsolete or fraudulent throwbacks to ignorance and superstition. The educated men who recorded the lives of martyrs, known as martyrologists, were usually priests or ministers who took it upon themselves to honour the sacrifices of their forebears in order to inspire the younger generation of recusants, Anglicans or Puritans to live pious lives. Convinced they were living in the end-times, Catholics and Protestants alike strove to set up their own religious group as the elect. This was defined in traditional martyrologies as the uncorrupted successor to the early church or, especially among radical Puritans, ancient Israel. Henrician and Elizabethan Anglicans in particular strove to create a brand of Catholicism distinct from both continental Protestant heresy, and the pre-Reformation popery depicted as advocating the worship of deceased saints, and the pope himself, rather than Jesus.

Key Words: Anglicanism, British Israelism, church history, English Reformation, Jesuits, miracles, punishment and torture, puritans, sainthood.

1. Introduction

This chapter will address the following research questions: how did Catholic and Anglican concepts of a divinely-chosen elect shape printed depictions of misfortune or unexpected natural phenomena? To what extent did this concept of divine providence adapt over time, and did terror or consent have a greater impact on Catholic or Anglican confessional identity?

The first section of my chapter will discuss the relationship between pre-Reformation sainthood, and efforts by later Elizabethan Anglicans and Puritans to set themselves apart as the divinely-favoured successors to Israel. My own position is that the notion of an elect represented neither rigid continuity, nor a total break with the past, but adaptation of existing beliefs, such as prophesy or divine providence, to demonstrate to readers that Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism remained relevant in a time of transition and persecution. Both sects reinterpreted

earlier models of martyrdom when these suited their agenda, although, as Alexandra Walsham's research on underground preachers suggests, Protestant accounts were generally more flexible.¹

Drawing upon Brad Gregory's research on European martyrdom, I will also discuss my research into a new group known as Non-Martyrs who were either spared execution; not recognised by their sect for alleged criminality, sexual-deviancy or undesirable views; or who submitted out of fear, frustration, or personal gain.² My research identifies three distinct models of Catholic and Protestant non-martyr in Tudor England: 1. Those not executed; 2. Those not recognised; and 3. Recusants and heretics who submitted to their persecutors and accepted either royal church-supremacy, or the authority of the pope. The language of inversion was used by Jesuits and Puritans to define a good Christian by explaining what he was not. By attacking the sexuality, piety, and learning of other sects, Catholic and Protestant martyrologist alike could discredit these rivals as deluded, irrational frauds and usurpers unworthy of redemption. My main argument for this section is that these negative depictions were motivated primarily by fear, on the part of both government, and members of the underground sects. The government were eager to discredit recusants and heretics as traitors and criminals in order to attack the legitimacy of the sect, while Catholic and Protestants' denunciation of problematic individuals was motivated by desire to both appear nonthreatening in the eyes of their persecutors, and avoid punishment on both earth, and the afterlife, for daring to criticise a ruler serving as the mortal representative of a vengeful, omnipotent God.

Finally, I will discuss Tudor concepts of miracles and divine-providence, especially the unexpected deaths of papist persecutors in Puritan minister John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Besides supposedly confirming early martyrs' predictions of disaster, and thus proving them to be prophets, Foxe's use of providence served as a parable for low-ranking readers on the absolute power of God and the state. No wicked act would ultimately go unpunished, and even if the cunning sinner evaded earthly justice, he would have to answer to God himself. One notable theme, which I will further discuss in my completed thesis, is my theory that the English Reformation represented a conflict not only between Catholic and Protestants, but also between moderate Anglicans and Catholic secular-priests, and radical Puritan and Jesuit factions seeking to dominate, and thus control, the Church of England or English Catholic mission.

2. Sainthood and the Elect

Congruent with the research of Eamonn Duffy, my own reading suggests Catholics and Protestants alike drew heavily upon the models of pre-Reformation sainthood.³ For Catholics, the aim was to establish continuity with the medieval church and emphasise its infallibility, in contrast to the Protestantism they deemed divisive, disorderly and contradictory. Both Marian propagandists like London

artisan Miles Huggard, and exiled Elizabethan missionary-priests like Cardinal William Allen or Jesuit Robert Parsons, attacked Protestantism for lacking ancient origins, and contrasted the patient endurance of early Christian martyrs with the insolence of recently-burned Henrician or Marian heretics.⁴ Huggard and his Elizabethan successors strove to depict the Marian martyrs as traitors to God and country for disobeying the orders of the queen and infallible pope to re-join the ancient Catholic Church founded by Christ, St. Peter and St. Paul.⁵

Drawing upon Alexandra Walsham's research on post-Reformation reinterpretations of the religious landscape and sacred space, my research suggests that Protestant martyrologists, too, adapted and reinterpreted older models in response to Catholic allegations of plagiarism.⁶ Lincolnshire Puritan minister and martyrologist John Foxe portrayed ancient saints and recent Marian martyrs not as supernatural beings, but as ordinary people overcoming their weaknesses and resisting damnable error through abstract notions like the power of prayer. A Marian exile, Foxe drew heavily upon the writings of his martyred contemporaries to equate both Marian persecutors and Elizabethan missionaries with inherently evil emissaries of the Antichrist associated with decadent, pagan Babylon.⁷ For Foxe and his fellow-Puritans, this malevolent figure was the pope, whose agents deceived the monarch, conspired with foreign enemies like the Spaniards, and undid all the gains of the Edwardian reformers. Seeking to appeal to radical Puritans and traditionalist Anglicans within the Church of England, Foxe portrayed Henry VIII not as a reforming Catholic, but as the proto-Protestant successor to the ancient Israelite King David. The king's schism with Rome was motivated not by lust for Anne Boleyn, but due to the realisation the late Medieval church no longer upheld the ideals of early Catholicism because of its perpetuation of relics; the veneration of inanimate objects and embezzlement of money contradicted Christ's teachings that his disciples should serve only God and live austere, penitent lives.

In contrast to the Catholic Church, Elizabethan Anglicans and Puritan ministers did not have to take into account centuries of pre-Reformation tradition.⁸ Instead, returning Marian-exiles like John Old, and young Elizabethan minister Andrew Willett, simply dismissed superfluous rituals and doctrine as evidence of Rome's decadence and corruption: superstitious popish idolatry, the fraudulent trade in relics, and the use of celibacy to conceal perversions.⁹ Additionally, Puritan martyrologists like John Foxe were known to portray Lollards, and even reforming Catholics like Henry VIII himself, as proto-Protestants in an attempt to demonstrate continuity between the reigns of Elizabeth, her brother Edward VI, and their father Henry. By drawing upon Old Testament models, Foxe and his fellow Marian exiles could establish English Protestantism as the uncorrupted successor not only of the early church, but also of ancient Israel, both of which had allegedly been abandoned by God for their decadence, sinfulness and rejection of the truth.¹⁰

3. Non-Martyrs

A new area of research my thesis will address is the representation of the group I term non-martyrs who had either failed in their mission, or actively betrayed their faith. The study of this group is important because it highlights the division between moderates and radicals within the Catholic and Protestant sects, with radical Puritans and Jesuits using the language of inversion to identify virtuous behaviour by explaining what a good Christian was not. My source-analysis suggests that Puritan ministers Francis Burton and John Foxe, and Anglican bishops like John Jewel, strove to create a uniquely Protestant English Israelite identity distinct from Henrician-era portrayals of the Church of England as a reformed version of Catholicism. Foxe, Jewel, and fellow-Anglican Thomas Brice, were themselves Marian-era exiles seeking to prove Protestant ideals remained entrenched among a sizeable section of the population engaged in a spiritual war against the antichristian enemy.

The first type of non-martyr, including exiles and martyrs of chains who died before execution, were viewed as second-class martyrs in the eyes of Anglicans and, in particular, traditionalist Elizabethan Catholics whose more rigid portrayals of martyrdom stemmed from the need for official approval. Traditionally, exile was viewed by Catholics and early Protestants as a shameful test of faith and last resort to prevent the shedding of innocent blood. Marian Protestants attributed their evasion of justice to good fortune and favour from a benevolent God who needed elders to perpetuate the ideals of the early church among the younger generation.¹¹ By contrast, the more radical Elizabethan Puritans, born after the persecutions, were more likely to recognise martyrs of chains on an equal footing out of desire to provide statistical proof that their particular sect suffered most under Elizabeth or Mary. In the case of radical separatists like Welsh minister John Penry, the aim was to establish continuity between the breakaway Puritan sect and the early Protestant martyrs, and justify resisting alleged popish rituals, especially the office of bishop, that risked corrupting the Anglican church.¹²

Elizabethan Catholic accounts, using hindsight, deemed exile a mission from an omnipotent God to resist tyranny in imitation of Old Testament prophets, not out of contempt for the law, but as a last resort to save England's soul.¹³ Unlike traditionalist secular-priests, exiled Jesuits like James Wilson, Robert Parsons, Thomas Fitzherbert, or Irishman Henry Fitzsimon, not only defended their martyred fellow-missionaries, but directly criticised the Elizabethan government and Foxe's Marian martyrs as enemies of God's chosen elect. Seeking to counter Foxe's allegations of sexual immorality and perverse cruelty, Elizabethan Catholics claimed jailed Marian persecutors, including Marian Bishop Bonner, were pious men and obedient subjects who died not from natural causes, but from negligence and deliberate abuse by spiteful, ruffian-like Protestant jailers.¹⁴ By claiming every imprisoned Catholic suffered or died for religion, priests could claim their sect had more potential martyrs, and was thus superior to Anglican

heresy because, unlike executed Protestants unable to flee justice, priests actively sought a glorious death in defence of their church.

The second group of non-martyrs were denied recognition in Catholic and Protestant martyrologies because their law-breaking and contempt for royal authority risked damaging the Catholic, Anglican, or Puritan sect.¹⁵ Examples include Puritan false prophet William Hackett, Henrician nun Elizabeth Barton, and Edwardian Catholic rebel Robert Kett, all of whom were depicted as tricksters and seducers deserving of execution for misleading the people into disobedience.¹⁶ By discrediting pre-Reformation rituals as artificial superstitions, Elizabethan government propagandists like John Jewel could equate Puritan separatists with Catholic recusants and discredit both sects as fraudulent or devilish.¹⁷ Violence and criminality were also denounced by the younger generation of Puritans like Francis Burton, who urged Calvinists within the Anglican Church to appear passive and law-abiding in order to avoid antagonising the Elizabethan regime and provoking worse retribution upon the laity.¹⁸

The final group, which ties in closely to my study of the bad deaths of persecutors, were the apostates, conformists and informers who submitted to the Marian or Elizabethan regime out of fear, duty to the monarch, or selfish desire for financial reward.¹⁹ These apostates were generally portrayed unflatteringly by the Marian and Elizabethan government, who deemed informants like Catholic priests William Parry and Antony Munday both faithless and untrustworthy because they could potentially betray their employer. Elizabethan Jesuits, and returning Marian Protestant exiles, were also eager to highlight the wickedness of these individuals, both to discredit rival sects as corrupt, and to provide a counterbalance to the ideal, pious Catholic or Protestant martyr.²⁰ The immorality of spies sent to infiltrate the underground sect provided an opportunity for exiled martyrologists, such as Foxe or Parsons, to divert attention from their own flight from justice by accusing their rivals of committing worse crimes. Their aim was to deny a religious angle to the persecution of the rival sect by claiming Elizabethan Catholics or Marian Protestants were executed not for religious crimes like popery or heresy, but for crimes against the government: sedition, blasphemy and unnatural treason against the divinely-ordained monarch.²¹

4. Miracles and Prophecies

Catholic and Protestant attitudes to relics, miracles and prophecies also represent a division between radicals and moderates, with both Elizabethan Puritans and Catholic priests using the voices of inaccessible figures from the past to criticise the regime. Catholics perpetuated the medieval belief in supernatural figures like angels appearing in visions, and often added a miracle to portray the priest as both a passive, humble channel of God's will, and as a zealous preacher in his own right. Puritans like Foxe and Burton generally attributed Marian martyrs' predictions of disaster to direct divine intervention, and not the result of prayers to

long-dead saints for intercession. The aim was to draw parallels with zealous Old Testament figures and prove their group was the successor both to Israel, and to the early church. By emphasising more abstract notions of a godly elect, and utilising logical Humanist assumptions that abuse of power would lead to instability, Elizabethan Puritans, and Jesuit missionaries like executed priest Robert Southwell, could appeal to traditionalists and learned men alike, and distance themselves from allegations of quackery or blasphemy.

On the other hand, mainstream Elizabethan Anglicans, and reforming officials within Henry VIII's independent Catholic Church of England, widely disapproved of prophesies and miracles due to their fraudulent use by stereotypically lazy pre-Reformation papist friars like John Darley or John Forrest, whose criticisms of the government were denounced as blasphemous lies.²² When perpetrated by low-status women like Henrician nun Elizabeth Barton or Elizabethan serving-girl Elizabeth Orton, the government went further and equated papist miracles with dangerous, harmful witchcraft.²³ The women involved were portrayed as both malevolent and foolish, being controlled and exploited by renegade priests. This was in line with later Edwardian and Elizabethan efforts to equate the pope with the antichrist and claim the Anglican church was not a heretical Protestant sect, but the only remaining uncorrupted branch of a Catholic church that had been infiltrated by devil-worshippers and sorcerers.²⁴

These criticisms brought about a change during the latter years of the Elizabethan era, with mainstream Puritans portraying themselves as reforming Anglicans in order to distance themselves from discredited radical separatists like Hackett, Barrow or Penry. Congruent with Diarmaid MacCulloch's research into government efforts to portray England as the new Israel, my source-analysis suggests a division among the Puritan faction. Although the younger generation of radical Puritans conformed out of fear of punishment, older Marian-era exiles like John Foxe were seemingly motivated by a combination of duty to the monarch, and enthusiastic desire to internally reform the Church of England along Calvinist lines.²⁵

Learned authority-figures could be portrayed as prophets to appeal to conservatives within the Anglican church; the dying Edward VI was actively equated with the wise biblical king Josiah by Elizabethan propagandists seeking to portray the five years under Mary as an aberration.²⁶ Anglican chronicler John Hayward, and Puritan minister John Foxe, tended to portray early martyrs as avowed Protestants in order to claim the ideals of the Elizabethan church already existed before Henry VIII's 1533 schism from Rome. Using hindsight, Anglican poet Christopher Carlile depicted Marian martyrs like Archbishop Cranmer as prophets, whose criticisms of Marian-era popery were portrayed as self-fulfilling predictions of Elizabethan Anglican Protestantism's triumph over pre-Reformation ignorance and idolatry.²⁷ This suggests that to Elizabethan government propagandists, rational learning and mystical sainthood were by no means

incompatible: martyrs could give scripturally-based sermons on the gallows that miraculously converted the previously hostile crowd, or, alternatively, the execution could coincide with mysterious natural phenomena, a disaster or unexpected death.

Elizabethan-era missionary-priests also toned down the miracles attributed to Catholic martyrs, providing more symbolic interpretations to give them credibility. However, for Catholics, evidence of a supernatural miracle remained a prerequisite for canonisation, and ultimately recognition by the pope as a saint. An example was Catholic priest Thomas Bailey interpreting illiterate Henrician-era nun Elizabeth Barton's visions not as a prediction of Henry VIII's death, but a foretelling of the end to the Tudor dynasty brought about by the childlessness of his offspring.²⁸ Radical Jesuits like Robert Southwell also combined pre-Reformation rituals with written accounts highlighting hanged priests' scholarly credentials, in order to undermine the Elizabethan government as barbaric and irrational for suppressing Catholic education, and unjustly killing men who posed no threat.²⁹ For both the weak woman Barton, and the self-controlled, humble Jesuit missionaries, their chastity, self-sacrifice, and reputed piety made them receptors for direct divine-intervention, meaning their criticisms of the government were not seditious or insolent, but the words of an inaccessible supernatural agent.³⁰

5. Divine Providence and the Bad Deaths of Persecutors

The final section will discuss the representation of the unpleasant, untimely deaths of persecutors, whose cruelty, hypocrisy and vengefulness made them the antithesis of what martyrologists from both sects deemed the ideal Christian. Drawing upon Gatrellian and Foucauldian concepts, my source-analysis suggests gruesome execution by burning or disembowelment was an effective form of social-control, because it not only reasserted the state's absolute power over the helpless body of the criminal, but also provided low-ranking subjects with a lesson regarding the consequences of disobedience and sinfulness.³¹ In this new area of research, I will argue that Elizabethan Anglican accounts of the bad death were intended to reassert the queen's power over her subjects by drawing parallels with an omnipotent, vengeful God with the ability to strike down wicked men and cast them into hell.

Accounts of divine providence, especially the fortunate escape of fugitives, was largely a Marian Protestant phenomenon that served as a substitute for mystical pre-Reformation miracles now deemed obsolete. In the eyes of returning exiles like Bishop Jewel, papist persecutors' deaths served as a lesson for the onlookers of the consequences of cruelty and immorality.³² Persecutors were represented in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* as dying stinking and raving mad: an outward reflection of their soul's inner corruption and impending damnation.³³ This was interpreted by fellow-Puritans like William Perkins as evidence of a vengeful God exerting power

over the bodies of wicked men, in the same way the Elizabethan government punished and tortured criminals as a deterrent and foretaste of the torments awaiting in hell.³⁴

Although the foul stench of pre-Christian persecutors sometimes appeared in Elizabeth Catholic sources, it was considerably more uncommon than in Protestant accounts. One reason may have been because missionary priests also died unpleasant, stinking deaths when disembowelled, raising questions among Protestants over priests' alleged purity.³⁵ Instead, Catholics preferred to depict the executions of former persecutors, like Henrician chancellor Thomas Cromwell, as evidence that an omnipotent God brought about the downfall of unjust enemies of the elect.³⁶ Catholics also used accounts of Protestant persecutors, informers and apostate priests going mad and losing control of their bodily functions.³⁷ Besides the analogies of a vengeful God punishing the wicked, these illnesses provided an opportunity for Catholics to perpetuate miracles by having a priest redeem, and convert, the ignorant Protestant in imitation of Christ. The lack of miracles in Protestant martyrologies were interpreted by Catholics as evidence Puritans and Anglicans followed a counterfeit sect that was inferior, powerless, and abhorrent to God.³⁸

6. Conclusion

My source-analysis suggests Protestant perceptions of non-martyrs, divine providence, and the concept of the godly elect were generally more flexible because, unlike Catholic missionaries, Anglicans and Puritans could adapt, or even ignore, pre-Reformation traditions. Most notably, Anglican bishops like Jewel, and Puritans like Foxe or Burton, sought to depict English Protestantism as possessing older, purer origins than popery. While not denying that Catholicism and Anglicanism were both offshoots of the early church, Puritans claimed English Christianity's spiritual-origins lay in ancient Israel. By depicting the English as Israelites chosen to replace both the Jews who rejected Christ, and corrupted, decadent Roman popery, Foxe could depict the Marian martyrs as prophets chosen to herald Elizabethan England's transition into a godly commonwealth worthy for Christ's anticipated return.

Although mainstream Puritans and Anglicans were eager to depict themselves as dutiful subjects enforcing reformation, my research suggests coercion was a more powerful motive for the majority of Tudor-era subjects. Apostatizing Marian Protestants reconciled with Rome; Elizabethan Catholic non-martyrs; and younger Puritans who reluctantly conformed to the church of England, were motivated primarily by fear of punishment at the hands of a government deemed omnipotent and divinely-ordained. The majority of traditionalist Catholics and Protestants agreed that the monarch was put in place by a terrifying, wrathful God to administer justice over secular affairs, and dispatch odious criminals for further punishment in the afterlife. Interestingly, the Henrician, Marian and Elizabethan

governments were also motivated by fear: not of punishment by a higher power, but of disobedience by low-status subjects. Criticism and contradiction of official proclamations risked spreading disorder and undermining the monarchy's claims to be infallible, hence the necessity to terrify commoners into submission by using gruesome, disproportionate punishments on alleged ringleaders like educated priests or Protestant ministers.

Both Puritans and radical Jesuits were more likely to introduce new constructs of martyrdom than their traditionalist counterparts, in order to set the divinely-favoured elect apart from the damned minority, and complement pre-Reformation mysticism that was at risk of becoming obsolete. As an example, both Puritan minister Foxe, and Catholic missionary Southwell, favoured the depiction of martyrs as scholars, whose learning was a gift from God, and whose pious, exemplary lives made them ideal receptors for divine intercession in the form of prophesy. When attributed to educated men, miracles, visions, and unexpected natural phenomena were deemed more credible due to the reputedly superior rationality and godliness of ordained clergymen.

The wider construct of divine providence suggests Jesuit and Puritan concepts of the supernatural evolved by the end of Elizabeth's reign, as prayers to the saints were complemented, and eventually supplanted by, direct intervention by an omnipotent, terrifying God who used natural phenomenon, disease and accidents to show his anger and warn bystanders of the consequences of wickedness. Like the secular government, God was viewed by Anglicans and Puritans as having the power to break the bodies of sinners and criminals in direct response to their persecution of the true church. The implication was that rival-sects on the receiving end of divine retribution worshipped a false, impotent deity, and not the God of Israel and the early Christians. Thus, the Gatrellian construct of disproportionate punishment as the ultimate deterrent is particularly relevant within the context of the Tudor Reformation, where the powers of church and state ultimately merged into an Anglican Protestant identity centred around the rejection of both heresy incompatible with official doctrine, and popery deemed a threat to royal-authority.

Notes

¹ Alexandra Walsham, 'Domme Preachers', *Past and Present* 168, No. 1 (2000): 121.

² Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 110.

³ Eamonn Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005), 23.

⁴ Miles Huggard, *The Displaying of the Protestants* (London, 1556), 102. British Library 001707967, General Reference Collection, C.37.b.45.

⁵ Robert Parsons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions of England from Paganism to Christian Religion* (London, 1688), 218; Henry Huntington Library Wing/P575, Reel 1154:01, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>; Oliver Almond, *The Uncasing of Heresy* (Douay: Douay English College, 1623), 3. Henry Huntington STC/12, Reel 817:02.

⁶ Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 566.

⁷ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1576), 5:783, <http://www.johnfoxe.org>.

⁸ Andrew Willett, *Synopsis Papismi* (London, 1592), 275. Cambridge University Library STC/25696, Reel 1503:01.

⁹ John Old, *A Confession of the Most Auncient and True Christe[n] Catholike Olde Belefe Accordyng to the Ordre of the .xij. Articles of Our Co[m]mon Crede* (Emden, 1556), 21. Cambridge University Library 18798, Reel 1389:12.

¹⁰ Anon., *The Lamentacion of England* (Germany, 1558), 2. British Library 10015, Reel 566:06.

¹¹ William Gualter, *Antichrist, That Is to Saye: A True Reporte, That Antichriste Is Come Wher He Was Borne, of His Persone, Miracles, What Toolles He Worketh withall, and What Shalbe His Ende* (Emden, 1556), 78. Henry Huntington STC/25009, Reel 370:02.

¹² John Penry, 'A Supplication of the Persecuted Brownist Church Delivered to Parliament, 10 March 1593', *Notebook of John Penry 1593, Camden Third Series LXVII*, ed. Albert Peel. (1944), 67:47.

¹³ James Wilson, *The English Martyrology* (St. Omer: Jesuit College of St. Omer, 1608), 196. Henry Huntington STC/25771, Reel 175:13.

¹⁴ Thomas Stapleton, *Counterblast to Mr Horne's Vain Blast against Mr Fekenham* (Louvain: University of Louvain, 1567), 368. Harvard University Library STC/23231, Reel 1258:02, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>; John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1570), 12:2283, <http://www.johnfoxe.org>.

¹⁵ Thomas Fitzherbert, *A Defence of the Catholyke Cause contayning a Treatise in Confutation of Sundry Untruthes and Slanders* (Douay: English College, 1602), 18. British Library STC/11016, Reel 799:03.

¹⁶ Henry Arthington, *The Seduction of Henry Arthington by Hacket Especiallie with Some Tokens of His Unfained Repentance and Submission* (London, 1599), 2. Henry Huntington STC/799, Reel 277:04.

¹⁷ John Jewel, *The Apology of the Church of England* (London, 1685), 9. Henry Huntington Library Wing J736, Reel 459:24.

¹⁸ Francis Burton, *The Fiery Trial of God's Saints* (London. 1612), 7. Harvard University Library STC/24270, Reel 1158:08.

¹⁹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1576), 8:1009, <http://www.johnfoxe.org>; Anthony Munday, *A Watch-Woord to Englande to Beware of Traytours and*

Tretcherous Practises (London, 1584), 42. Henry Huntington STC/18282, Reel 426:08.

²⁰ Martin Aray, *The Discovery and Confutation of a Tragical Fiction Deuysed and Played by Edward Squyer Yeoman Soldiar, Hanged at Tyburne the 23. of Nouemb. 1598* (London, 1599), 12. Folger Shakespeare Library STC/9, Reel 635:06. <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>.

²¹ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1583), 8:1255, <http://johnfoxe.org>; Patrick McGrath, *Papists and Puritans under Elizabeth* (London and New York: Walker, 1967), 184.

²² John Darly, *Vision of John Darley, Monk of Canterbury* (27 June, 1535), British Library Cotton MS, Cleopatra .e.iv, fol.129; Edmund Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (London, 1548), 233. Henry Huntington 12722, Reel 128:01.

²³ Thomas Cranmer, *A Confutation of Unwritten Verities* (London, 1556), 106. Harvard University Library 5996, Reel 491:14.

²⁴ Gervase Babington, *A Profitable Exposition of the Lord's Prayer* (London, 1588), 144. Henry Huntington Library 1090, Reel 169:04.

²⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 1999), 199.

²⁶ Thomas Brice, *The Register of Martyrs* (London. 1559), 4. British Library STC/3726, Reel 178:19.

²⁷ Christopher Carlile, *A Discourse, Concerning Two Diuine Positions* (London. 1588), 167. Henry Huntington STC/4564, Reel 202:01.

²⁸ Thomas Bailey, *The Life and Death of John Fisher Bishop of Rochester* (London, 1655), 188. Lyon Public Library 425/104, <http://books.google.com>.

²⁹ Robert Southwell, *Epistle of Comfort to the Reverend Priests* (London: Arundel House. 1587), 197. Bodleian 22946, Reel 1220:01.

³⁰ Anon., *The Widdoves Mite Cast into the Treasure-House of the Prerogatiues, and Prayses of our B. Lady* (St. Omer: Jesuit College of St. Omer. 1619), 64. Folger Shakespeare Library STC/11490, Reel 578:05.

³¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Allen Lane, 1979), 27; Vic Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15.

³² John Jewel, *The Apology of the Church of England* (London, 1685), 41. Henry Huntington Library, Wing J736, Reel 459:24.

³³ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, 1583), 11:1812, <http://johnfoxe.org>.

³⁴ Thomas Lupton, *Persuasion from Papistry* (London, 1611), 300. Henry Huntington STC/16950, Reel 4080:02.

³⁵ William Barlow, *An Answer to a Catholic Englishman* (London, 1609), 135. Harvard University Library 1446.5, Reel 1701:08.

³⁶ Anon., *The Theatre of Catholic and Protestant Religion* (St. Omer: St. Omer Jesuit College, 1620), 19. Bodleian Library STC/4284, Reel 1441:05.

³⁷ Roger Edgeworth, *Sermons Very Fruitful, Godly and Learned* (London, 1557), cxvii. Bodleian Library STC/ 7482, Reel 219:02.

³⁸ Anon., *The Widdoves Mite Cast into the Treasure-House of the Prerogatiues, and Prayses of our B. Lady, the Immaculate, and Most Glorious Virgin Mary* (St. Omer: St. Omer Jesuit College. 1619), 130. Folger Shakespeare Library STC/11490, Reel 578:05.

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‘Apocalypse Now’: The Roles of End-of-Days Prophecies in Islam from the Sublime Taj Mahal to Salafist Anarchy

Cynthia Finlayson

Abstract

Surahs (Chapters) 39, 40, 45, 55-56, 69, 75, 77-81, 84, and 89 of the *Qur’an* deal specifically with a coming Apocalypse, often called a ‘Day of Recompense’ and the ‘Day of Reality.’¹ The Prophet Muhammad’s visions of this forthcoming time of God’s judgment of all human kind were so intense that it was said they turned the hair on the Prophet’s head completely grey from fear.² Despite their critical importance in Islamic doctrine, few in the Judeo-Christian West understand the roles of these Apocalyptic visions in the formation of a Muslim consciousness, both with relation to individual concepts of salvation, and as the driving forces behind critical Muslim social and political community movements over time. This chapter compares and contrasts two manifestations of the diverse roles of the Apocalypse in Islam from the sublime Sufi-inspired Taj Mahal with its ordered gardens, architectural plan, and *Qur’anic* inscriptional program, to current radical Salafist anarchist agendas whose aims are to create world chaos from which they believe the final Islamic state will emerge to redeem the religious elect of the world.

Key Words: Apocalypse, Arab Spring, Islam, Islamist Movements, Salafi, Taj Mahal.

1. Apocalypse and the *Qur’an*

Qur’anic descriptions of the Apocalypse or ‘End of Days’ have inspired some of the most beautiful examples of Islamic art and architecture including the famous Taj Mahal at Agra, India. However, these scriptural sources have also engendered religious and military forces in Islamic history that have ultimately changed the political face of the world. Recent revivals of apocalyptic movements in Islam are currently impacting the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ and its continued manifestations throughout the Near East, particularly in Egypt and Syria. This chapter explores the diverse roles of the Apocalypse with relation to both individual and community salvation within the complex worlds of Islam.

To be a Muslim one must believe and practice the so-called ‘five pillars of the faith,’ all of which are founded upon *Qur’anic* sources. Given *Qur’anic* texts, a probable sixth pillar of faith in Islam encompasses the belief in a final apocalyptic event during which every individual Muslim, as well as all of human kind, will be judged by God/*Allah* and held accountable for their actions, intentions, and thoughts.³ The *Qur’anic* texts are deliciously descriptive with relation to both the

End-of Days punishments in store for the wicked, as well as the luscious physical and spiritual rewards awaiting the righteous.⁴ The powerful apocalyptic visions engendered by the rich Arabic poetry of the *Qur'an* have subsequently inspired the on going Muslim quest to obtain individual salvation in ways not replicated or often understood by Western Christianity. Where Christians can depend on the redeeming role of Christ to compensate for an individual's inadequacies via the Messiah's atonement for all mankind at the Day of Judgement, Muslim's must rely on their own individual efforts to obtain God's forgiveness for their human failings. Thus, for Muslims, there is no intermediary in this process and each must work out their own individual salvation via their personal relationship with their Creator given the injunctions of the *Qur'an* and the previous role model of the Prophet Muhammad. The intense spiritual pressures of this very personal process thus help to explain the importance for practicing Muslims of living within a community that supports their spiritual goals, versus struggling daily in a 'morally decadent' society that undermines their efforts. Personal salvation is often tied to the social environment and community in which each Muslim individual resides. In some adherents' minds, Islam is thus politicised by its very nature, and its social roles often expanded beyond the rights of the individual to policing the moral and economic survival of the society at large. A modern-day example of the extreme application of this assumption is exemplified in the restrictions placed upon the women of Afghanistan under Taliban rule as an Islamist reaction to the increase in prostitution experienced in the country under previous Russian occupation. This phenomenon stems in great part from the Arab tribal heritage of Islam where an individual's actions were (and still are in some regions) ultimately the responsibility of his/her family, clan, and tribe. Compensation to a victim of a crime was often a group responsibility, not just that of the individual perpetrator, thus a tribal member's actions could greatly harm or benefit his/her entire community.

The major differences that exist between most modern Western societies and fundamentalist Arab Islam may also help to explain the potent roles that a Last Judgement has played in the formation of socio-political movements in the history of Near Eastern Islam throughout time. These religious and deeply seated cultural assumptions also help to illuminate the current on-going debate in Muslim contexts concerning the questions of how salvation might be achieved in a modern world challenged with globalization and the aftermath of Western colonialism in developing countries with significant Muslim populations.⁵ This question is the essential issue currently driving much of the unrest in the Arab Near East today. It is critical for Western readers to understand that this is not just a question of how resources are distributed or controlled in challenging environmental regions, but for many Muslims, this debate is essential to the very question of their individual salvation as well as the salvation of their extended family and community, given *Qur'anic* prophecies of an Apocalyptic Last Judgement. As previously

emphasised, the responsibility of every individual Muslim to seek out their own salvation makes this question much more potent in ways that differ from its conceptualisation in Christian contexts.

The following paragraphs will deal with the influences of Apocalyptic *Qur'anic* prophecies with relation to 'individual salvation' as evidenced in the religio-artistic design of the Taj Majal. The last portion of this chapter will deal with manifestations of Apocalyptic trends with relation to 'community salvation' among radical Salafist factions within Islam.

2. The Individual, Apocalypse and the Throne of God (Taj Mahal)

As the geographical and political empire of Islam grew following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in C.E. 632, schisms developed concerning the exact nature of Islamic governance over an increasingly complex number of cultures and peoples. With growing governmental complexity came the related challenges of the depersonalisation of the relationship between the individual and God, and an increased emphasis upon rote religious rituals devoid of their full spiritual potential and meaning. Within a very short period of time, numerous Sufi mystical orders emerged in Islam as a counter reaction to these forces.⁶ Each Sufi organization or individual teacher emphasised various paths to achieving a personal spiritual relationship with God in this life as an alternative to waiting for a union with the Creator at death and during a Final Apocalyptic Judgement Day.⁷ The mystical foci of Sufism thus deemed spiritual intentions and religious exploration in the quest for personal salvation and/or perfection as often more important than ritualised rote religious actions. Alternatively, differing forms of Sufism also attempted to link a deeper religious or metaphysical meaning to personal improvement and salvation through the extreme emphasis on daily, ritualised actions.⁸ Nowhere are these mystical Sufi linkages and the personal individual quest for salvation from an Apocalyptic Last Judgement more visually illustrated than in the funerary monument of the Taj Mahal built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (1592-1666 C.E.) in C.E. 1631 at Agra, India for his favourite wife Mumtaz Mahal (1593-1631 C.E.) who died giving birth to their fourteenth child.⁹

The Mughal imperial court had long been influenced by Sufism, even attempting to pattern individual daily behaviours on the works of the twelfth century Sufi polymath al-Ghazali (d. C.E. 1111) and the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi (d. C.E. 1214) in the spiritual quest to achieve the status of 'the Perfect Man,' or 'Perfect Woman,' as mirror images or copies (*nushka*) of God.¹⁰ Thus, in the words of Dr. Wayne Begley:

in effect, the layout of the Taj complex and the apocalyptic imagery running through the Koranic inscriptions strongly suggest that the monument was conceived as a vast allegory of

the Day of Resurrection, when the dead shall arise and proceed to the place of Judgment beneath the Divine Throne.¹¹

The domed mausoleum of the Taj is almost 250 feet high and it is placed in a walled enclosure and garden system measuring on the outside 1,000 by 1,860 feet and containing over 42 acres of area. The complex also contained an exterior nearby caravansary for pilgrims visiting the site. It is therefore obvious that the Taj Mahal was intended to be more than just a receptacle for the body of a beloved imperial wife. The Taj's monumental size, architectural components, gardens, calligraphic programme including some of the most strongly worded apocalyptic *Surahs* from the *Qur'an*, as well as the complexity of its overall symbolic programme indicate that the Taj was meant to fulfil numerous political as well as spiritual functions. Primary among its metaphysical functions was to address Sufi concepts of the Last Judgement and the relationship of an individual human soul to the attainment of a personal resurrection and unity with the Creator, i.e., the ultimate quest for perfection. The symbolic messages of the Taj are thus complex. A fuller discussion of these elements in relation to individual salvation will be included in a forthcoming hard copy book chapter.

Unlike other Mughal tomb gardens based on the usual Persian style 4-part or *chaharbagh* garden where the tomb is placed in the centre, the Taj Mahal, hosting the cenotaph of Mumtaz Mahal, is placed at the apex of the garden. Dr. Wayne Begley has proposed that the Taj's six octagonal towers or *burj* were meant to represent these heavenly pavilions, with the Taj itself representing the Throne of God on Judgement Day.¹² On Judgement Day, the righteous will approach the Throne of God through the Gardens of Paradise and witness a vision of God in indescribable beauty. The earliest known Sufi depiction of the Throne of God is a geometric diagram in *Futuh al-Makkiyya* by the great 13th century mystic Ibn al-Arabi.¹³ As previously noted, this was a work that was widely circulated throughout the Islamic world including India. As Begley points out, it is important to note the similar location of the Taj within its garden setting in relation to the *Futuh al-Makkiyya's* visual conception of the Throne of God.¹⁴

The *Qur'anic* passages associated with the decorative programme of the Taj also reference the omnipresence of a coming Apocalyptic Day of Judgement and each of these inscriptions is located in symbolically appropriate locations within the buildings and architectural structures associated with the Taj complex. The choice of the specific *Qur'anic* passages utilised was deliberate, and the designers coordinated every detail of the buildings of the Taj complex with specific locational usages of the passages. For example, the south façade of the gateway to the whole complex is decorated with the entire *Surah* 89, *al-Fajr*, 'The Daybreak,' one of the great apocalyptic *Surahs* of the *Qur'an*. At the end of the terrible list of punishments for evil are promises that God will guide the righteous on the true path to Paradise. This passage then begins the path of the visitor through the

gardens of the Taj Mahal. The four water channels of the gardens are probably also meant to symbolise the four flowing Rivers of Paradise mentioned in the *Qur'an* and *Hadiths*. The raised marble tank in the centre of the garden may represent the celestial tank of abundance called the *al-Kawthar* promised to Muhammad and seen by him at the time of his bodily ascension to Paradise. The layout of the Taj and the uses of the major apocalyptic texts or *Surahs* of the *Qur'an* as inscribed architectural embellishments hint that the entire complex is a huge allegory of the Day of Resurrection when the dead shall arise and go to the place of Judgement beneath the Throne of God. While some of the *Qur'anic* texts that were chosen are often utilised in Muslim funerary contexts, others were verses specifically associated with the apocalyptic end of the world.¹⁵

Allegorically, the body of Mumtaz Mahal, placed directly beneath the dome of the Taj, is thus positioned directly beneath the Throne of God on the Apocalyptic Day of Judgement, possibly reflecting her status as a 'Perfect Woman' as understood in Sufi mystical contexts as well as her role as a primary Mughal queen. My research has further revealed that in some Sufi mystical circles popularised in Mughal India (particularly those of Ibn Arabi), the female form was seen as more perfect and thus more symbolic of the human potential for perfection.¹⁶

Most significant to my discussion is the fact that the Taj was meant to be visited and supported as a pilgrimage site given the caravansary that was built in association with the entire complex. The architectural elements noted above indicate that a broader purpose existed for the Taj Mahal that both transcended and complimented its function to symbolically represent the resurrection of Mumtaz Mahal on the Day of Judgement. The Taj was also a very public place for pilgrimage and thus also meant to act as a three-dimensional replication of Sufi maps of the Throne of God and the Last Judgement. It thus potentially functioned as a physical nexus for transcendent spiritual contemplation. Given the Sufi desire to obtain union with God in this life, the Taj Mahal also served as a geometric pathway used to develop the spiritual contemplation of the glory of God in Sufi mystical experiences. The entire complex with its related epigraphic inscriptions from the *Qur'an* can thus be seen to be a mnemonic devices focussing the mind on the spiritual quest for union with the Creator and the perfection of self in preparation for the coming of an apocalyptic event. The Taj is thus a very personal and individualistic icon of the political power, wealth, and the perceived spiritual status of both Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, but also a building designed to share the spiritual quest for salvation with a wider audience through time and space. Significantly, the Taj accomplishes its roles as a vehicle of salvation through its sublime beauty and complex mystical ordering of physical space, not through political or military force. This mystical Muslim vision of the Apocalypse and the individual's relationship to its forthcoming events contrasts sharply with the emerging Islamist paradigm discussed below.

3. Apocalypse, Salafist Anarchy and the Salvation of Community

In the world of Arab Islam, religion has always been conceived of as a venue for political, cultural, and social change as well as a tool for liberation from oppression.¹⁷ This phenomenon is due to Islam's early roots in tribal Arabia and its historic struggle against severe persecution. Additionally, the tribal heritage of Islam inextricably linked it with the concept of a religiously guided community where the separation of religious faith from social governance was often non-existent. While this early tribal means of socio-religious organisation functioned as long as the community of the faithful remained small and the Prophet Muhammad remained alive, the nature of its transition from a tribally based entity to the political realities of an Islamic empire after the death of the Prophet have remained problematic. Thus, the practical characteristics, nature, and judicial functions of a politicised Islamic state remain the foci of some of the most heated topics of debate within Islam to this day, and represent underlying currents in the unrest now plaguing many Arab countries in the Near East including Egypt and Syria.

In the minds of many modern Muslim thinkers, political Islam is often linked not only with the actions of the Prophet Muhammad against the tyranny of pagan hegemony in 7th and 8th century Mecca, but also with the military actions of Salah Ad-Din (Saladin) and his successors against the aggression of Western Crusaders during the 11th through the 13th centuries C.E. in the Near East.¹⁸ It is thus easier to understand why many fundamentalist Muslims in the Near East today conceive of political Islam as a cyclical process of struggle against Western political and cultural incursions given on going modern experiences with Western colonialism, military invasion, political and economic dominance, and globalisation. In the words of Hasan Hanafi, 'political Islam is both an old and modern phenomenon.'¹⁹

One of the most powerful rising tides within political Islam is that of the Salafi movement associated with Ibn Taymiyya whose roots go back to Ahmad bin Hanbal, the founder of the first Salafi religious-political organisation.²⁰ The Salafis derive their title from the Arabic word *salaf* whose various meanings include 'to precede.'²¹ This term is further associated with *as-salaf as-salih*, the companions of the Prophet Muhammad who are considered to be the purist founders and examples of the early believers in Islam.²² Included in this grouping are their followers and the earliest interpreters of Islamic jurisprudence.²³ Thus, modern Salafis claim to be following the earliest forms of Islamic governance founded not only by the Prophet Muhammad but also by the earliest Companions of the Prophet. The Salafis contrast this 'purer path' with subsequent schools of Islamic thought and jurisprudence based on the later development of more controversial *Hadith* literature. In essence, the Salafis reject human understanding, analysis, and reasoning as insufficient in comparison to obeying the pure divine patterns and prohibitions as stated in the *Qur'an*.²⁴ Given these assumptions, they share much historically and idealistically with the Wahhabi Movement that was critical in bringing into being the creation of the modern state of Saudi Arabia under the rule

of the Ibn Saud monarchy in the last century. It is thus not surprising that much of the financial backing for the current Salafist military and political actions in both Syria and Egypt are funded by private sources in both Saudi Arabia and Qatar. From its historic inception, the Salafi movement has reacted against both previous Islamic rational thinkers like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Western humanism. According to Hasan Hanafi, the four critical slogans of modern political Islam include: 1) a call for the governance of God over the governance of man-made political systems; 2) Islam as the alternative to all previous 'isms' in the world (socialism, communism, liberalism, etc.); 3) Islam as the solution to all the problems in the world, esp. the developing world with relation to economic inequality and the distribution of scant world resources; and 4) an implementation of Sharia legal systems.²⁵ More liberal Reformist Salafis hope to obtain these goals through personal and social transformations driven by educational means. More aggressive forms of Salafism (like al-Qaida) believe that the current situation of the Islamic world is so threatened by negative Western cultural, moral, and political incursions that violence must be utilised to attain their ultimate goal of a worldwide Islamist state devoid of Western evils and influences.²⁶ In the most radical of these movements, the use of anarchy is seen as a means to bring about an apocalyptic world condition that will in turn eventually force the emergence of the true Islamic State on a worldwide scale.

4. Conclusions

Given current political, social, economic, and religious trends in the Near East and elsewhere in the complex worlds of Islam, significant personal artistic public manifestations of the individual Muslim struggle to obtain apocalyptic salvation have almost disappeared in the modern Muslim world. Since great art and architecture like the Taj Mahal are often driven by wealthy patronage, it is important to note that the richest Islamic states including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and certain other oil rich Gulf States are the very same entities now under Wahabist and growing Salafist religio-political influences – influences that resoundingly reject both Sufi mysticism and historic and modern Muslim rational inquiry and scholarship. Therefore, the spiritual forces and individual quest for perfection and salvation that inspired the design and building of the Taj Mahal in Mughal India of the 1700's will never be replicated by these modern nation states or individual patrons living within them. Additionally, while moderate Salafis emphasise the importance of individual salvation through constant self improvement and religious education, the on going impacts of Western globalisation and military insertions in the Islamic Near East have caused this process to shift from a focus on individual salvation to a focus on the perceived need for community salvation through reactionary means. These forces and counter reactions have further politicized Islam in the region given the Muslim collective cultural memory of both the Crusades of the medieval period and modern Western colonialism and military

intervention. The very existence of Western humanism and political-economic influences and actions in the Near East are thus driving an increasing radicalisation of evolving Islamist movements. Some of these movements feel especially inspired by their unique interpretations of *Qur'anic* descriptions of a forthcoming Apocalypse on a worldwide scale. These beliefs, inseparably related to the need for the purification of both the individual and the Muslim community in order to survive an Apocalyptic Day of Judgement, further drive some radicalized Islamist movements to counter check Western cultural and political incursions through increasing dependence on violence in order to achieve their goals. The West is often completely oblivious to this phenomenon as well as clueless to the role of Islamic Apocalyptic beliefs in this process. For example, many in the West are completely unaware that the government of Saudi Arabia hosted one of the most radicalized Syrian Salafist clerics, Imam Aru within their borders and allowed him to constantly broadcast Salafist agendas into Syria that targeted the Syrian Ba'thist secular government. Donors in Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf States including Qatar have also heavily funded the arming of resistance groups within Syria that are increasingly being subsumed by imported elements of radicalised Sunni and Salafist volunteers to countercheck the perceived threats of *Shi'a* Iran. Additionally, it is believed by many in the region (given *Qur'anic* allusions and *Hadith* literature) that Christ will return in the End of Days to his minaret at the Great Umayyad Mosque of Damascus in order to fight the last battle against the anti-Christ.²⁷ In Muslim contexts, the role of Jesus is a critical one in the final events preceding the Last Judgement. Given my interviews of young Syrians in Damascus and Palmyra in late June of 2011, many of the young Salafist fighters now pouring in to Syria from surrounding countries to assist the Islamist factions in the resistance against the As'ad Baathist regime see the conflict in that country as a fulfilment of End of Days prophecies. They also see this as a necessary community action against a Syrian political regime heavily associated with Alawi and Shi'a Iranian aspects supported by post Soviet Russia (atheist communism) and communist China. In their minds the stage is thus set for 'Apocalypse Now.' No quantity of loss of human life or destruction of cultural heritage sites or museums representing the soul essence of Syria will stand in their way since the Apocalypse will negate their human value by its very coming. Thus, in the minds of these young Salafist fighters, out of the chaos of the civil wars fermented in Syria and Egypt, the true Islamic Millennium will emerge.

Notes

¹ All *Qur'anic* sources come from 'Abdullah Yusef Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an: A New Edition with Revised Translation, Commentary, and Newly Compiled Comprehensive Index* (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 2001). The 'Day

of Judgement' is mentioned also in *Surahs* 1:4; 2:281; 3:25; 3:75; 3:106; 3:185; 3:194; 4:87; 4:109; 5:14; 6:12; 6:16-17; 6:22-23; 7:53; 7:59; 7:167; 10:45; 10:93; 11:3; 11:84; 11:103-108; 14:31; 14:41-42; 14:48-51; 16:25; 16:27-34; 16:92; 16:124; 17:13-14; 17:36; 17:97; 18:98-101; 19: 37-40; 20:100-109; 22:7; 22:56; 22:61; 23:16; 23:100; 25:17-30; 26:87-102; 30:12-16; 30:43-44; 30:55-57; 39:15; 39:31; 39:47-48; 39:67-75; 40:15-20; 42:45-47; 43:65-77; 45:26-35; 55: 39-41; 56: 1-56; 58:6-7; 58:18; 60:3; 60:6; 66:7-8; 67:27; 68:42-43; 69:13-37; 70:1-4; 75: 7-15; 77:29-49; 78:17-40; 79:34-46; 80:33-42; 81:1-14; 84:1-15; 85:2; 86:9-10; 89: 21-30; 99:1-8; 100: 9-11; 102:8; as well as under numerous other titles such as the 'Day of Account,' the 'Day of Assembly,' the 'Day of Eternal Life,' the 'Day of Gathering,' the 'Great Overwhelming Event,' the 'Day of Noise and Clamour,' the 'Day of Requit,' the 'Day of Resurrection,' the 'Day of Sorting Out,' etc.

² According to one *Hadith*, when the Prophet Muhammad heard *Surah* 81 of the *Qur'an*, 'The Folding Up' (*al-Takwir*), the hairs of his head and beard turned completely grey from fear. See J. Robson, trans., *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. II (Lahore: Orientalia Art Ltd., 1975), 1111.

³ See fn. 1.

⁴ See fn. 1. Also, references to the 'Gardens of Paradise' found in *Surahs*: 3:15; 3:133; 3:136; 3:195; 3:198; 4:57; 4:122; 5:85; 5:119; 7:19; 7:42-43; 7:49; 9:21-22; 13:35; 15:45-48; 18:31; 18:107-108; 20:76; 22:14; 22:23; 25:10; 25: 15-16; 25:24; 29:58; 30:15; 31:8-9; 35:33-35; 26:26; 36:55-58; 38:49-54; 39:72-73; 40:40; 43:70-73; 44:51-57; 51:15; 52:17-28; 54:54; 56:11-40; 76:5-22; 77: 41-44; 78:31-36; 79:41; and 89:30. See also in Yusef Ali's index, 'A Garden on High,' 'A Home That Will Last,' 'A Realm Magnificent,' 'An Assembly of Truth,' 'Firdaws,' 'Four Gardens,' 'Gardens of Abode,' 'Gardens of Bliss and Felicity and Delights,' 'Gardens of Everlasting Bliss,' 'Home of Peace,' 'In the Presence of Allah,' 'Lofty Mansions,' etc.

⁵ See for example the most recent publication on this subject by Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁶ See A. J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 52-71, 72-74 and 218-255.

⁷ See Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sufi: Expressions of the Mystic Quest* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 6-21.

⁸ See for example the teachings of the great Sufi scholar Al-Ghazali in, Muhammad Abul Quasem, trans., *Al-Ghazali on Islamic Guidance* (Bangi: University of Malaysia, 1979). In this work, Al-Ghazali stresses the importance of ritualising every mundane daily human action as honoring Allah and striving to be spiritually in the moment of His presence.

⁹ Even the royal Mughal court was not spared the grim realities of the high mortality rates for both women and children characteristic of the age. Only seven

of the fourteen royal children of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal survived infancy. Their first-born child, a girl, had been her grandfather's (Emperor Jahangir) favourite. When this child died at age 6, Jahangir isolated himself in grief from the court for over a month. Additionally, Mumtaz Mahal was reportedly very beautiful in both continence and personality. Shah Jahan had only been emperor for approximately three years before her untimely death. Mumtaz Mahal's name meant the 'Elect of the Palace,' or, the 'Most Excellent of the Palace,' and her death was apparently devastating on many levels given the roles that Mughal queens playing in the political affairs of the kingdom. For a comprehensive account of the rule of Shah Jahan see, W. E. Begley and Z. A. Desai, trans. and eds., *The Shah Jahan Nama of 'Inayat Khan: An Abridged History of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan Compiled by His Royal Librarian* (Delhi, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ See W. E. Begley, 'The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning', *The Art Bulletin* 61 (1979): 31-35.

¹¹ Ibid., 25, as well as his associations with this allegorical design to an illustration in Ibn al-'Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, a manuscript copy known to have belonged to the Emperor Jahangir who gifted it to a Sufi, the father of one of Shah Jahan's most trusted companions.

¹² Ibid., 16.

¹³ See fn. 12.

¹⁴ Begley, 'The Myth of the Taj Mahal', 18 and Fig. 20.

¹⁵ These include: *Surah* 36 *Ya Sin* (Called the 'Heart of the Qur'an) – v. 58 the vision of God given to the faithful; *Surah* 81 *Al-Takwir*-The Folding Up; *Surah* 82 *Al-Infitar*-The Cleaving Asunder; and, *Surah* 84 *Al Inshiqaq*-The Rending Asunder.

¹⁶ L. Bakhtiar, *Sufi: Expression of the Mystic Quest* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 19-20 and 21 (from Ibn Arabi); 68, 82, 94-95 and 102.

¹⁷ Hasan al-Hanafi, 'Islamism: Whose Debate Is It?', *Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam*, eds. Richard C. Martin in association with Abbas Barzegar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 53-54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁹ Ibid., 58. For a list of the modern political and military resistance movements utilising Islamic calls for jihad against outside invaders and Western colonisers since the turn of the last century and the actions of Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani who developed political Islam in the modern age see pages 58-67.

²⁰ Ibid., 62.

²¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 184.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid..

²⁴ Al-Hanafi, 'Islamism: Whose Debate Is It?', 62.

²⁵ Ibid. 72.

²⁶ Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*, 184. For a list of current Salafist supporters and religious leaders see page 185.

²⁷ This is a common belief among the faithful in the Levant and Arabia. For a discussion of the Hadith sources see Ibn al-Mubarak, Zuhd, page 77, in 'Abdallah al-Marwazi Ibn al-Mubarak, *Kitab al-Zuhd wa al-Raqa'iq*, ed. Habib al-Rahman al-A'zami (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al'Ilmiyya, n.d.); and Ibn Hanbal, Zuhd in Abu 'Abdallah Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Shaybani Ibn Hanbal, *Kitab al-Zuhd*, ed. Muhammad Zaghul (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1988), 97. Tarif Khalidi notes that Sunnites and Shi'ites still argue over the question of whether the predicted Mahdi, or Muslim Messiah, will be of a higher status than Jesus (Shi'ite view), or if Jesus will be greater than the Mahdi (Sunnite view) at the Day of Judgment. See Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 229, fn. 42.

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Postmillennialism and the American Missionary Enterprise in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Nineteenth Century

Justin Michael James Dell

Abstract

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the first missionary society chartered in the United States, and the most diffuse body of American missionaries that operated worldwide during the nineteenth century, commenced evangelistic efforts in Ottoman Syria and Palestine in the 1820s. The objective of the ABCFM's mission was the introduction of Protestant Christianity to the Ottoman Empire and the achievement of the mass conversion of Ottoman souls to Christ. The grand scheme of the ABCFM in the Levant envisioned the complete religious overhaul of the Ottoman realm, including the conversion of Muslims to Christianity, the reformation of the Catholic and Orthodox churches in the East along Protestant lines, and the Christianisation of Jews and their repatriation to Palestine. The American missionaries expected these grand feats to precipitate the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire – an evil entity in the ideology of the apocalyptically-minded ABCFM – and the inauguration of the Millennium, the end-times period of corporeal bliss on earth, which was projected to follow the vanquishing of the 'eastern antichrist' and the Christianisation of the globe. This chapter explains the aggressive and audacious designs of American mission work in the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century through the lens of postmillennialism, an eschatological belief system prevalent in the United States after the American Revolution, one which inflamed American religious passions and coloured some of the United States' earliest interaction with the Middle East. This chapter argues that the concept of postmillennialism serves as an ultimate explanation of the religious, political, and Christian Zionist objectives of the ABCFM's mission in the Ottoman Empire.

Key Words: ABCFM, postmillennialism, Ottoman Empire, missionaries, Millennium, apocalypticism, Christian Zionism, nineteenth century, Holy Land, Jonathan Edwards.

'A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.'¹ Gesturing to this biblical axiom in his sermon, 'A Model of Christian Charity,' Reverend John Winthrop and his congregation of English puritans established the landmark settlement of Boston on Massachusetts Bay in 1630 C.E. The calculated prominence of this colony was indicative of the objective of its founders; they did not intend to hide from the world, but sought rather to influence it, to see it remade in their image. Perry Miller, the eminent authority on American puritanism, recognised that,

‘Massachusetts Bay was not just an organization of immigrants seeking advantage and opportunity. It had a positive sense of mission.’² That mission was to shine the light of a pristine Christian society in the New World on the insufficiently reformed churches and societies of the Old.

Generations later, descendants of these American puritans chose a different mission – the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. This Muslim imperial domain was squarely in the crosshairs of Congregationalist ministers, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons, as they preached to parishioners from the lofty pulpits of Boston’s Old South and Park Street churches on 31 October, 1819. These twenty-five-year-old preachers came to these twinned parishes on this Reformation Sunday to herald their imminent mission to the Ottoman Empire, where they intended to play a critical role as divinely-commissioned agents of its demise. They, like many other New England Christians of the antebellum period, sincerely believed that the existence of the Ottoman Empire stood between them and the advent of a new era of paradise on earth known as ‘the Millennium.’

This belief, called ‘postmillennialism,’ explains (1) why, at the beginning of the 19th century, conservative American Christians sought to establish a missionary presence in the Ottoman Empire with remarkable vehemence and (2) what this mission was projected to accomplish in the Near East. This chapter will briefly explain the basic hypothesis of postmillennialism, expose its ubiquity in early-19th century American religion, elucidate its place in the paradigm of American missionaries, and account for its influence upon American missionary activity in the Ottoman mission field.

Fisk and Parsons represented the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). This mission society was founded in 1810 at the behest of ambitious students of Williams College and Andover Theological Seminary, men who pledged to export their religious tradition beyond the shores of America and convert the world to what they considered true Christianity. Some of the most respectable members of New England society comprised the original leadership cadre of the ABCFM, including leaders of the General Associations of Congregationalist churches in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and the presidents of Yale, Bowdoin, Middlebury, Union, and Princeton Colleges.

From the moment of the ABCFM’s constitution, its leadership resolved to establish a mission in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Palestine in the Ottoman province of Syria, where no U.S. mission had hitherto been attempted. In 1820, Fisk and Parsons made landfall in Palestine where they became the first Americans to set foot in Jerusalem. They immediately established a mission station in the Holy City and were soon joined by additional missionaries who founded stations in Beirut and Istanbul. Over the course of the succeeding decade, the ABCFM committed a score of missionaries to the Ottoman Empire, constructed schools in Ottoman Syria and Anatolia, and distributed thousands of bibles and religious tracts to Muslims, Jews, and Catholic and Orthodox Christians.

Christian millennialism anticipates the inauguration of a thousand years ('the Millennium') of peace, prosperity, and the unobstructed reign of Christianity on earth, the coming of which is prophesied in the Revelation of St. John.³ Timothy Dwight, the millenarian president of Yale College and one of the founding members of the ABCFM, trumpeted the imminence of the Millennium in a sermon he delivered at the annual American Board convention in 1813, and praised its advent, 'when all distinctions of party and sect, of name and nation, of civilization and savageness, of climate and colour, will finally vanish.'⁴ A social revolution would take place in which, 'the stranger will every where find a home; and the wanderer, an asylum. The heart of charity will no longer be icy; nor her hand shut.'⁵ Wars would cease, for as Dwight predicted, 'the monarch, and the Republic, will no longer summon their wretched subjects to the field of battle; the great slaughterhouse of mankind.'⁶

The anticipation of this new world order occupied a preeminent place in the antebellum American psyche; as American religious historian, Ernest R. Sandeen, rather crudely expresses it, 'America in the early 19th century was drunk on the Millennium.'⁷ But American churches were divided over the issue of exactly how and when the Millennium would be inaugurated. Some believed and taught that Jesus Christ would return from heaven and impose the Millennium by divine force – the doctrine of premillennialism. Others believed that Christians should seize the initiative and create the Millennium themselves. Through the evangelisation of the globe, they believed Christians could create paradise on earth and enjoy the Millennium, only after which Christ would return to assume leadership of a Christianised planet.⁸

During the Great Awakening of the 18th century, the greatest preacher of the American colonial period, Jonathan Edwards, popularised postmillennialism. C. C. Goen succinctly summarises Edwards' eschatology in stating that Edwards 'foresaw a golden age for the church on earth, within history, and achieved through the ordinary processes of propagating the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit,'⁹ all without having to wait for the Second Coming. Under Edwards' influence, postmillennialism became the predominant eschatological opinion of American Protestant churches by the early 19th century.¹⁰ It instilled American society with the optimistic view that the Church, led by American Christians, would boldly advance to conquer its enemies and usher in the Millennium by its own effort.¹¹ Thus, at the time of its christening in 1810, the ABCFM adopted postmillennialism as a matter of course; indeed, postmillennialism was the very impetus behind its commission.

The ABCFM's official postmillennialism was manifest in the conviction of Timothy Dwight, who made it clear to his ABCFM colleagues that the religious, social, and political reforms of the great millennial revolution would be accomplished:

...not by miracles, but by means. To the numerous votaries of idolatry, and superstition, are to be sent the Word of God, and the Ministers, by whom it is preached. To these are to be added, also, other books, less expensive and more numerous, into which the Word of God is transfused; together with Schoolmasters, and Catechists, to teach the children, while Ministers are instructing the Parents. In a word, the very means, by which men have become Christians here, are to spread Christianity through the world.¹²

By the antebellum period, most American postmillennialists believed that they were living in the phase of world history immediately antecedent to the Millennium. Samuel Hopkins, a disciple of Jonathan Edwards, had predicted that the Millennium would commence, 'about two hundred years from the end of the eighteenth century.'¹³ Likewise, Timothy Dwight placed equal confidence in chronological date-setting,

It is the proper time, as it is marked out by the Spirit of prophecy. Almost all judicious commentators have agreed, that the Millennium, in the full and perfect sense, will begin at a period, not far from the year 2000.¹⁴

However, this proximity, he implored, necessitated that Christians commit every last man and resource to the conversion of the entire world so as to inaugurate the Millennium at 'the date assigned.'¹⁵

This necessitated engagement of the Ottoman Empire. It was, in fact, a veritable axiom amongst American postmillennialists that the Christianisation of the globe would involve a final, spiritual showdown between Christians and Muslims. Jonathan Edwards had preached as much when he promulgated postmillennialism in *A History of the Work of Redemption*:

The two great works of the devil which he in this space of time wrought against the kingdom of Christ, are his creating his Antichristian and Mohametan kingdoms, which have been, and still are, two kingdoms, of great extent and strength, both together swallowing up the ancient Roman empire; the kingdom of Antichrist swallowed up the Western empire, and Satan's Mahometan kingdom the Eastern empire. As the scriptures in the book of Revelation represent it, it is in the destruction of these that the glorious victory of Christ, at the introduction of the glorious times of the church [the Millennium], will mainly consist.¹⁶

The destruction postmillennialists wished to see achieved was understood to be both corporeal and spiritual. From a spiritual perspective, postmillennialists hoped to assail the Ottoman Empire by converting millions of Muslims to Protestant Christianity.¹⁷ From a corporeal perspective, the ABCFM desired the destruction of the Ottoman Empire as a political and territorial entity.

Many American postmillennialists, starting with Jonathan Edwards, argued that America possessed a divine mandate to export to foreign lands the ideals of liberty, enlightenment, and even material benefits, all of which were held to be contingent on adherence to (American, Protestant) Christianity.¹⁸ For, as Rufus Anderson, corresponding secretary of the ABCFM wrote, 'without the gospel, there can be no such thing as a free government.'¹⁹ Conversely, the introduction of the gospel was understood to be the engine behind political and social change. In this vein, Anderson boldly wrote, 'the gospel confers political power.'²⁰ American millenarians believed that America was the bastion of liberty and order that it was precisely because of its supposed religious purity.²¹ Thus, as Lawrence Davidson observes, American millenarians essentially, 'married their mission to redeem Palestine (and the rest of the world as well) to the mission of American political and institutional Manifest Destiny.'²² Religious instruction was expected to reshape society as a whole, for as Rufus Anderson observed, religious opinions, 'determine the mode of education, they shape the government, they give character to the literature, and the philosophy of the nation.'²³

For the ABCFM, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire was also expected to liberate the land of Palestine for Jewish resettlement. Christian Zionism, the Christian initiative to repatriate Jews to their ancient land of origin, was a critical element in the ABCFM's designs on Ottoman territory. In essence, it stipulated that the Millennium could not commence until the Jewish diaspora, the descendents of the original 'chosen people' of the Abrahamic God, were 'restored' in Palestine.²⁴ This 'restoration' was conceived to be two-fold.²⁵ First, it meant Jews would be physically repatriated to their ancient homeland in Palestine and reconstituted as Israel. Second, it meant that the Jews would be 'restored' to divine favour by converting to Christianity. As Jonathan Edwards had written:

Though we do not know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass; yet this much we may determine by the scripture, that it will be before the glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished.²⁶

Obviously, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire was a necessary prerequisite for the realisation of the Jewish repatriation to Palestine.²⁷ American missionaries believed that once the Ottoman Empire was swept away, Jews from around the world would uproot themselves and flock to the Holy Land by reason of presumed

national instinct. As Levi Parsons told the congregants of Park Street Church in Boston before his departure for the Levant:

Admit that the Jews are to be restored to their own land....there still exists in the breast of every Jew an unconquerable desire to inhabit the land which was given to their Fathers; a desire, which even a conversion to Christianity does not eradicate. Destroy, then, the Ottoman Empire, and nothing but a miracle would prevent their immediate return from the four winds of heaven.²⁸

The ABCFM considered it vital to convert the Jewish population already resident in Ottoman Palestine, and in Jerusalem in particular, where 10,000 Jews were estimated to reside.²⁹ 'We do not expect the conversion of the Jews by a miracle,' Levi Parsons preached, but rather:

The means which God hath appointed must be employed. The millions of Jews must be furnished with the word of God, and with the instruction of missionaries. But this cannot be done without charity; without the liberal, and persevering efforts of the Christian world.³⁰

The conversion of Jews in Palestine was expected to lead to a domino effect of conversions in the world-wide Jewish diaspora. 'Let the Jews of Judea embrace the Messiah,' Pliny Fisk preached, 'and they would with ease and efficacy make known to their brethren everywhere, that they had found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets did write.'³¹ After all, it was supposed, 'Judea, their ancient residence, has always been a rallying point, the centre of information and influence, for the Jews.'³²

The audacity of the ABCFM's desire to convert millions of Ottoman Muslims to Christianity, preside over the dissolution of the Sultan's empire, and assist in the repatriation of Christianised Jews to Palestine tempts the modern reader to doubt whether such designs were literally intended. Yet, the statements of ABCFM leaders and missionaries make the literalism of intentions unmistakable. As Pliny Fisk wrote to his superiors upon arrival in the Ottoman Empire:

Yes, small as our forces are, we will, trusting in Him, who is mighty, confidently besiege this great empire of sin. We may perish in the siege before the first stone shall fall from the wall. But it is not more certain, that the walls of Jericho fell before the ancient people of God, than it is, that the whole Mahommedan world will be subdued by the Gospel.³³

A number of coincidental religious and geopolitical developments around the world convinced the ABCFM that the moment was right to strike a fatal blow to the Ottoman Empire. Rev. Alvan Bond, a Congregationalist pastor in Sturbridge, Massachusetts wrote in 1828:

The establishment of a Protestant Mission in Palestine forms an important era in the history of modern missions. That country has been so exclusively under Papal and Mahommedan dominion, that it has been regarded as not only a perilous, but hopeless enterprise, to attempt there the introduction of evangelical religion. The church, since the commencement of the present century, having awakened to bolder efforts, has watched the 'signs of the times' as they respect the Jewish and Mahommedan nations – nations which, like the walled cities of the Anakims, have seemed to defy whatever exertion the church could make to gain possession.³⁴

One of these 'signs' was the comparative strength of Christian Europe and America vis-a-vis the Islamic Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century. England's expansive empire in the Mediterranean and its influence in Constantinople were welcomed by the American Board as an unprecedented blanket of protection that facilitated the establishment of Christian missions in hostile Levantine territories.³⁵

Other 'signs' became more apparent after ABCFM missionaries became settled in the Levant, including the eruption of the Greek War of Independence and periodic outbreaks of plague.³⁶ In accordance with the apocalyptic imagery of the Revelation of St. John, the millenarians anticipated that the world would be violently convulsed with wars, plague, and human suffering just prior to the Millennium. Moreover, the Near East 'bible lands' were expected to be the primary theatre in which these prophetic events would unfold. As missionary William Goodell wrote of Ottoman Syria, which included Lebanon and Palestine, 'most of the prophecies certainly had special reference to the state of things in this country.'³⁷ Thus, during this period 'of war, tumult, oppression and robbery',³⁸ brought on by the Greek War of Independence and by natural disaster, the transformation of the Ottoman Empire into 'a country of rebellion and revolutions, of fires, earthquakes and plague,' as Fisk described it, was welcomed as confirmation that the end of the existing world order was nigh.³⁹ Goodell wrote to his superiors in Boston:

We have for several months had before our eyes, in reality or prospect, war, pestilence, and famine, and indeed all the principal scripture signs of the coming on of the end of all things; and have

daily been looking in common with Mussulmans and Christians and Jews of the country, for some great convulsion.⁴⁰

The course of events appeared to be moving even faster in the direction of an apocalyptic climax whenever there was talk of European intervention in the conflict over Greek secession. Fisk identified this anxiety as ‘wars and rumours of wars,’⁴¹ an oft-cited verse from the King James Bible, descriptive of the end of the world.⁴² ‘Almost everything,’ Goodell wrote in 1826, ‘seems to be tending towards some terrible battle between Christ [and Antichrist].’⁴³ In the face of the carnage wrought by the Greek War of Independence, the potential for the Ottoman Empire’s disintegration, and the liberation of Palestine for Jewish resettlement, Levi Parsons wrote to his superiors that, ‘during this season of war and distress...the purposes of Jehovah seem to be rapidly unfolding to the honour of His great name. The result will be unspeakably glorious in the eyes of all who seek the salvation of Israel.’⁴⁴ He later explained further, ‘Let us not forget that the walls of Jerusalem were once built in “troublesome times,”’ and that ‘the same thing may, with the blessing of God, take place again.’⁴⁵

Postmillennialism is the primary explicatory factor in the analysis of why American mission activity was undertaken in the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century and what it sought to achieve. It accounts for why the ABCFM desired, as most necessary, spiritual combat with Islam and with the Empire by which the Muslim religion was represented. Postmillennialism, an ideology which proposes the construction of a corporeal paradise on earth, explains why, in the minds of American missionaries, the Ottoman Empire had to be swept away. Finally, the antebellum American fascination with the Jewish diaspora, its plight and its repatriation to Palestine is explained only if attention is paid to the position of Christian Zionism in the system of postmillennial eschatology.

Notes

¹ Matt. 5:14, Geneva Bible.

² Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 4.

³ Revelation, 20:1-6.

⁴ Timothy Dwight, *Sermon Delivered in Boston, Sept. 16, 1813, Before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at Their Fourth Annual Meeting* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1813), 7-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 42.

⁸ Rufus Anderson, 'The Value of the Gospel', Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, ABC 16.5, Miscellaneous Papers Relating to the Near East Missions, Vol. 1, Communications for the Mediterranean, 1817-1837, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁹ C. C. Goen, 'Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology', *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, ed. William J. Scheick (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), 152.

¹⁰ Robert K. Whalen, 'Postmillennialism', *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*, ed. Richard Landes (New York: Routledge, 2000), 326-329; James H. Moorhead, 'Apocalypticism in Mainstream Protestantism, 1800 to the Present', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol. 3, ed. Stephen J. Stein, *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), 73-75 and 82; *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover: With a Sketch of Its Rise and Progress* (Boston: Farrand, Mallory and Co., 1808).

¹¹ David W. Kling, 'The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions', *Church History* 72, No. 4 (December, 2003): 800.

¹² Dwight, *Sermon*, 19-20.

¹³ Samuel Hopkins, 'A Treatise on the Millennium', *The Works of Samuel Hopkins*, Vol. II (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1865), 310; William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 53-54.

¹⁴ Dwight, *Sermon*, 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23, 26 and 31.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption Containing the Outlines of a Body of Divinity in a Method Entirely New* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication), 265.

¹⁷ Dwight, *Sermon*, 13.

¹⁸ Moorhead, 'Apocalypticism in Mainstream Protestantism', 77.

¹⁹ Rufus Anderson, 'The Value of the Gospel', Papers of the American Board, ABC 16.5, Vol. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Moorhead, 'Apocalypticism in Mainstream Protestantism', 77.

²² Lawrence Davison, 'Christian Zionism and Its Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy', *U.S. – Middle East Historical Encounters: A Critical Survey*, eds. Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Bernhardsson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 190.

²³ Rufus Anderson, 'The Value of the Gospel', Papers of the American Board, ABC 16.5, Vol. 1.

²⁴ Reiner Smolinski, 'Apocalypticism in Colonial North America', in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, Vol. 3, ed. Stephen J. Stein, *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, 52-55; George L. Berlin, 'Joseph S.C.F. Frey, the Jews, and Early Nineteenth Century Millenarianism', *Journal of the Early Republic* 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1981): 27.

²⁵ Levi Parsons, 'On the Dereliction and Restoration of the Jews', *Holy Land Missions and Missionaries* (Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1977 [1819]), 9-14.

²⁶ Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 313.

²⁷ Cogley, 'The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the Judeo-Centric Stand of Puritan Millenarianism', *Church History* 72, No. 2 (June, 2003): 315.

²⁸ Levi Parsons, 'On the Dereliction and Restoration of the Jews', 12.

²⁹ Journal of Levi Parsons, April 7, 1821, Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, ABC 16.6: Mission to the Jews, 1824-1831, Vol. 1, Palestine Mission, previous to Sept. 1824.

³⁰ Parsons, 'Dereliction and Restoration of the Jews', 19.

³¹ Pliny Fisk, 'The Holy Land An Interesting Field of Missionary Enterprise', *Holy Land Missions and Missionaries* (Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1977 [1819]), 30.

³² Ibid., 27.

³³ Alvan Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk, Late Missionary to Palestine* (1828: Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1977), 113-114.

³⁴ Ibid., iii.

³⁵ Isaac Bird and William Goodell to Ambassador Peter Abbott, October 4th, 1826, Papers of the American Board, ABC 16.6, Vol. 2, Palestine Mission, 1824-1830, Letters and Journals.

³⁶ Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons to Jeremiah Evarts, February 8th, 1820, Papers of the American Board, ABC 16.6, Vol. 1.

³⁷ William Goodell to Jeremiah Evarts, September 29th, 1826, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.5, Vol. 1.

³⁸ William Goodell to Jeremiah Evarts, April 8th, 1826, Papers of the American Board, ABC 16.6, Vol. 2.

³⁹ Journal of Pliny Fisk, April 12, 1821, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.6, Vol. 1.

⁴⁰ William Goodell to Rufus Anderson, August 20th, 1827, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.6, Vol. 2.

⁴¹ Journal of Pliny Fisk and Jonas King, April 25, 1823, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.6, Vol. 1.

⁴² Matt. 24:6.

⁴³ William Goodell to Jeremiah Evarts, November 20th, 1826, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.6, Vol. 2. Note: The words following ‘Christ’ in this quotation are partially obscured by damage to the original document.

⁴⁴ Levi Parsons to Samuel Worchester, July 17th, 1821, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.6, Vol. 1.

⁴⁵ Pliny Fisk to Jeremiah Evarts, January 7, 1822, Papers of the American Board ABC 16.6, Vol. 1.

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Part 5

Literature and the Apocalypse

The Apocalypse Is Here, Again: Moral Ambiguities and Human Failings in *Watchmen*

Lara Narcisi

Abstract

Alan Moore's 1987 graphic novel, *Watchmen*, can at first appear to be a postmodern commentary on the futility of the Cold War world. However, the book's conclusion begs for a more complex rereading – one that sees this particular moment reaching its crisis as only one of many. Moore focuses less on the means of destruction – nuclear weapons, relatively new to human history – and more on human psychology, which he demonstrates to be the true genesis of annihilation. Nuclear capability enables more widespread destruction, but the intractable problem is our own desire to rewrite history. Ozymandias, modeling himself after both Ramses II and Alexander the Great, sees himself as capable of single-handedly creating a new peaceful world order, and his scheme works: but only temporarily. The ending radically destabilises any hopes for Ozymandias' success, as indicated by Dr. Manhattan's prophetic comment that nothing ever really ends. While superheroes fail to be super, however, Moore indicates that there may be some hope for the future, and it rests in our common humanity.

Key Words: Watchmen, Moore, apocalypse, morality.

The twentieth century was, according to John Berger, 'thoroughly marked, perhaps even defined, by apocalyptic impulses, fears, representations, and events.'¹ Alan Moore's 1987 graphic novel *Watchmen* vividly depicts these anxieties with a plot that leads inexorably towards a large-scale atomic attack. In most texts, this would be the worst possible scenario: the apocalypse is now. But in *Watchmen* this is only the prelude to a far more sinister revelation: that such apocalypses are not the exception, but the norm. Furthermore, it is humanity, not fate or history, that proves to be the agent of destruction. Moore suggests that while innate human cruelty and vaingloriousness create this mass annihilation, the simultaneous and equally universal potential for human connection amidst the ruins may be what saves us all.

Watchmen, like much apocalyptic fiction, may seem at first to be completely chaotic in both style and message. Despite its postmodern pyrotechnics, however, *Watchmen* does express a coherent philosophical worldview. Its potentially bewildering pastiche of genres² can mislead readers into dismissing it as a postmodern meta-commentary on the impossibility of finding meaning in the face of our inevitable doom. For example, critic Ho-Rim Song sees the book as an attempt to 'frustrate readers' interpretation,' claiming '*Watchmen* shows that the

empty meaningless space is concealed by meaningless patchworks of fact and fiction.³ While this is a tempting initial conclusion, *Watchmen* shows, upon rereading, myriad cyclical patterns that both presage the apocalypse and suggest its inevitable recurrence.⁴

At first a reader may observe seemingly chaotic switches from highbrow literary references (Shelley and Blake) to pop cultural ones (Costello and the Velvet Underground), a lot of clock pictures, and a hodge-podge of 'documents.' This may appear random, but every chapter, originally published as a separate book, patterns these elements consistently: they all begin with an excerpt of a quotation and then conclude with the rest of the quotation; they all picture the doomsday clock progressing from twelve minutes until midnight up to the midnight of nuclear destruction; all except the last chapter conclude with a 'paper-clipped' document, attached by an unknown hand. That hand reminds us of the authorial and artistic hands of Moore and Gibbons, who carefully structured this work to elucidate their vision.

These initial patterns point us towards others. There are structural repetitions within the characters: two Silk Spectres, two Nite Owls, two vigilante groups with two shared members. The plot contains similar structures; the seemingly unrelated texts-within-the-text coalesce at the end so that nothing feels extraneous. Even the layout is patterned; the entirety of Chapter 5, aptly borrowing from Blake for the title 'Fearful Symmetry,' is laid out like a mirror: the panel shapes of the whole chapter reflect each other, merging in the centre spread. The closer we look, the more structure appears.

Image repetitions likewise appear contradictory, but in fact provide a similar structure. The cover depicts the Comedian's blood-stained smiley-face pin – an unsettling juxtaposition between humour and agony. Both the smiley face and the blood-stain shape recur, often replicating the initial incongruity; for example, the stain appears as a smudge on the glass of Ozymandias' Antarctic terrarium, revealing exotic flora thriving amidst the ice. Similarly complex is the Rorschach test image, or what Bryan D. Dietrich calls the 'human stains.'⁵ The ambiguous shape appears as happily embracing lovers in some contexts, but for the character Rorschach it conjures traumatic memories of his mother prostituting herself to an abusive client. The contradictions in these central images – a blood-stained smiley face, an oasis in Antarctica, embraces of love or coercion – significantly counterbalance images of violent destruction with ones of compassionate connection.

If the world consisted of just superheroes and villains we might hope for the former to save the world from the latter. *Watchmen* suggests, however, that no such salvation is possible because the potential for brutality and kindness coexists within us all. In part this mind-set is reflective of the Cold War anxieties dominating the time period, when anyone could be an enemy. Moore calls attention to the contrast between his own fearful time and the seemingly simpler interwar

period through Hollis Mason's autobiographical book-within-the-book, *Under the Hood*. Mason (later Nite Owl I) discusses his childhood love of pulp adventure fiction of the early 1930s, for 'there was a sort of prevailing morality in them' and they depicted a world of 'absolute values, where what was good was never in the slightest doubt and where what was evil inevitably suffered some fitting punishment.'⁶ *Watchmen* proffers no such easy escapism, and the time period it depicts holds no such easy morality.⁷ As Moore stated in a 1987 documentary, nuclear weapons have a profound psychological impact:

They are a generation growing up now who cannot see past the final exclamation mark of a mushroom cloud. They are a generation who can see no moral values that do not end in a crackling crater somewhere [...] I think it is very, very naïve to assume that you can expose the entire population of the world to the threat of being turned to cinders without them starting to act, perhaps, a little oddly.⁸

These comments reveal both Moore's despair at his Thatcherite era and its culture of fear, and also his implicit desire for those 'moral values' that now seem so elusive. Moore's nostalgia is not as naïve as Mason's appears to be,⁹ but his comments suggest his profound awareness of and discomfort with the psychological effects of the Cold War.

It is therefore appropriate that all of *Watchmen*'s 1980s superheroes display great moral ambiguity; they lie, cheat, are either hypersexual or frigid, or, in the case of Dr. Manhattan, display total indifference to the fate of humanity. Many critics have drawn attention to the lack of clear morality throughout the text;¹⁰ the final stand-off between Ozymandias and Rorschach is, however, particularly significant for understanding Moore's view of the inevitability of apocalypse. Ozymandias is an attractive public icon who styles himself after a powerful titan of early civilisation; Rorschach is an unattractive loner who names himself after a symbol of complete relativism.¹¹ Ozymandias instigates nuclear war and Rorschach fights to the death to stop him; however, the two hold ideologies that ultimately and troublingly converge. Rorschach, in his characteristic broken grammar, tells the prison psychologist that his discovery of the rape and murder of a six-year-old proved to him that 'Existence is random. Has no pattern save what we imagine after staring at it for too long. [...] Was reborn then, free to scrawl [sic] own design on this morally blank world.'¹² This, of course, is exactly what his alleged nemesis Ozymandias attempts to do. Ozymandias bends his moral code for utilitarian principles, deeming the massacre of millions to be collateral damage worth the price of world peace; Rorschach, a brutal killer, will die himself before killing the 'good' or 'innocent' – according to his own moral calculus. Both are

ultimately Machiavellian, and both bear responsibility for the decimation that comes.

The conclusion brings these moral morasses to the fore when we learn that Ozymandias has commissioned a fake alien and psychically transported it to atomically explode, murdering millions of innocent New Yorkers (and itself). This is clearly, as Bob Rehak puts it, 'the metaphorical equivalent of nuclear Armageddon';¹³ the results are horrific, filling seven gruesome pages of gory images devoid of any text save the scattered detritus left behind by the massacred populace. The title of the chapter, once revealed, is painfully ironic in juxtaposition to the bloodbath: 'A Stronger Loving World.'¹⁴ The title represents Ozymandias' belief that he has permanently united all hostile nations against a (nonexistent) common enemy, but the book in no way condones the drastic measures of this self-designated superman or *Übermensch*. In explaining his plot, Ozymandias tellingly quotes Hitler's famous observation that bigger lies are more believable¹⁵ – a reminder that history will continue to supply near-omnipotent madmen, whatever their motives, bent on destroying the world.

The end of the story is not really the ending, despite Ozymandias' apparent and self-proclaimed victory. Although confident of his success, Ozymandias, as though seeking paternal approval, asks Jon uncertainly, 'I did the right thing, didn't I? It all worked out in the end.' But Jon, who can see across time, answers: 'In the end? *Nothing* ends, Adrian. *Nothing ever* ends.'¹⁶ The weighty implication is that this story too will play out again: desperate attempts for peace, temporary successes, and their ultimate failure. Significantly, Jon's prophetic line repeats on the following page in a completely different context: an aging Sally Jupiter, annoyed by a knock on her door at Christmas, mutters an exasperated, echoic: 'It never ends.'¹⁷ The previous repetitions have all pointed to this great and tragic repetition of history. Ozymandias' name itself now becomes a clue to this same pattern; not only is this character modeling himself after a past figure who rose and fell, but Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1875 poem of the same name describes the folly of all great men who dream of eternal empires and personal immortality. Shelley envisions the great Pharaoh proclaiming, 'Look on my works ye mighty, and despair!', but history shows that 'Nothing beside remains.'¹⁸ Supermen and their creations are replaced, inevitably, by others.

This cyclical patterning of history is one of the significant implications of Moore's timeline differing from our own. In *Watchmen* the U.S. wins the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon is president-in-perpetuity, but the anxiety of nuclear war remains a constant. Science fiction often envisions 'butterfly effect' parallel universes that could be completely transformed by the smallest alteration. Here, however, humanity's threat to destroy itself and the planet is one of the few unvarying realities. The world of *Watchmen* is chaotic, but it is a cyclical chaos, predictable in its certain recurrence. Peace and war, good and evil, order and chaos, will and must continue in their eternal struggle.

Cycles often provide reason for optimism; each ending is a new beginning. In *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, Eugen Weber compares cyclical visions of end times in Zoroastrianism, American Indian religions, Greek mythology, and Christianity, and concludes that:

When the world ends, it could be argued that all that ends is the world we know. The end of the world was really only the end of one world, not the end of times but the end of our times, not the annihilation of mankind but the end of a way of life and its replacement by another.¹⁹

Watchmen's perspective is more troubling, suggesting the inevitability of self-appointed supermen who will destroy the world; this appears to be a kind of postmodern hell with the video on endless replay. The book suggests, however, that there is at least one reason for hope within this bleak future: the possibility for kindness and compassion.

Human connection is perhaps all that we have, as we see from lovers such as Laurie and Dan, or Max Shea and Hira Manish, taking comfort in each other's arms as catastrophes occur. In a converse parallel the psychologist Mal leaves his self-centred wife Gloria because he cares too much for the good of others, telling her, 'In a world like *this*...I mean, it's all we *can* do, try to *help* each other. It's all that *means* anything.'²⁰ Most poignantly, there is the story of two near-strangers, a news vendor and a young comics fan of different races but the same name. Faced with the looming prospect of World War III, the previously gruff vendor gives his cap to the boy to shelter him from the rain, saying, 'We all gotta look *out* for each other, don't we?'²¹ Most powerfully, we see the two desperately embracing at the moment of their deaths as New York explodes – all the colours pale and fade to white, until even their stain, the same shape as the blood on the smiley face, disappears. The apocalypse cannot be stopped, but neither can the human impulse to help and protect one another. While the superheroes' morality may be questionable, the goodness of older Bernie protecting younger Bernie in his final moments is absolutely clear.

This is not to claim that Moore's vision of humanity is a hopeful one. The news vendor notes that pirate comics have superseded superhero ones in public interest; this is a world more fascinated by the triumph of evil than the victory of goodness.²² This vision is appropriate for the times, as James Berger states:

We know what the end of the world looks like. We know because we've seen it, and we've seen it because it's happened. The images of Nazi death camps, of mushroom clouds and human silhouettes burned onto pavements, of not just massacres but genocides in a dozen places, of urban wastelands and

ecological devastation are all part of our cultural heritage. Apocalypse is our history.²³

Watchmen frequently refers to the horrors of such events, from the Depression to Hiroshima to Vietnam; there is even a popular band called Krystalnacht. Moore, however, observed that ‘the presence of the atom bomb may almost be forcing a level of development that would not have occurred without the presence of the atom bomb,’²⁴ suggesting that our awareness of our own destructive capability may have reshaped our values in a positive way.

Moore thus depicts the cycle of destruction without negating the hope that it will someday break. In a 1992 interview he mentioned that he ‘would like to think that this disintegration of coherence that seems to be going on throughout our culture is part of some step towards some new kind of reintegration.’²⁵ Moore does not necessarily see the future getting better, but his art makes a powerful plea for alternatives. The book’s cycles of violence and love suggest the simultaneously bleak and beautiful notion that our humanity is both our destruction and our salvation. Moore presents our world as prone to cyclical apocalypses wrought by vainglorious men, but he leaves hope for a better one. The final panel ends with a message for all readers: ‘I leave it entirely in your hands.’²⁶

Notes

¹ James Berger, ‘Twentieth Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths’, *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 46, No. 4 (2000): 388.

² *Watchmen* includes sections of an autobiography, news clippings, memos, letters, psychological case files, an entire comic book within the book, and more.

³ Ho-Rim Song, ‘Text’s Resistance to Being Interpreted: Unconventional Relationship between Text and Reader in *Watchmen*’, in *Practicing Science Fiction: Critical Essays on Reading, Writing, and Teaching the Genre*, eds. Karen Hellekson, Craig B. Jacobsen, Patrick B. Sharp and Lisa Yaszek (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., Jefferson, 2010), 122.

⁴ The book directly asks for this kind of careful rereading; the young comics fan, Bernie, says something of his favourite comic books which can be taken as a message to Moore’s reader: ‘They don’t make *sense*, man! That’s why I gotta read ’em over.’ Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (New York: Warner Books, 1987), XI.23.

⁵ Bryan D. Dietrich, ‘The Human Stain: Chaos and the Rage for Order in *Watchmen*’, *Extrapolation* 50, No. 1 (2009): 120.

⁶ Moore, *Watchmen*, ‘Under the Hood’, II.5.

⁷ Nor did the real 1980s. Communists are not detectable on sight, rendering the ‘enemy’ invisible and precipitating the Red Scare.

⁸ Alan Moore, *England Their England: Monsters, Maniacs and Moore*, dir. Norman Hull, 1987, Central TV documentary, accessed 7 June 2013, <http://vimeo.com/62772659>.

⁹ For more on nostalgia in and about *Watchmen*, see Elizabeth Rosen, “‘What’s That You Smell Of?’: Twenty Years of Watchmen Nostalgia”, *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction* 35, No. 98 (2006): 85-98.

¹⁰ See for example Jamie Hughes, ‘Who Watches the Watchmen? Ideology and “Real World” Superheroes’, *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, No. 4 (2006): 546-557.

¹¹ This is the character’s stated view of the Rorschach test; psychologists might disagree.

¹² Moore, *Watchmen*, VI.26.

¹³ Bob Rehak, ‘Adapting *Watchmen* After 9/11’, *Cinema Journal* 51, No. 1 (2011): 155.

¹⁴ Moore, *Watchmen*, XII.6.

¹⁵ Ibid., XI.26.

¹⁶ Ibid., XII.27.

¹⁷ Ibid., XII.28.

¹⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Ozymandias of Egypt’, 1875, accessed 4 May 2013, <http://www.bartleby.com/106/246.html>.

¹⁹ Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1999), Kindle edition.

²⁰ Moore, *Watchmen*, XI.20.

²¹ Ibid., III.25.

²² Equally grim is the moment when Mason and the Comedian use violence to subdue a riot, and Mason asks nostalgically, ‘What’s happened to the American dream?’ In the midst of the flames and the wreckage, the Comedian grimly responds, ‘It came true. You’re lookin’ at it’. Moore, *Watchmen*, II.18.

²³ Berger, ‘Twentieth Century Apocalypse’, 388.

²⁴ Moore, *England Their England*.

²⁵ Quoted in Bryan Dietrich, ‘The Human Stain’, 130.

²⁶ Moore, *Watchmen*, XII.32.

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The Eschatological Dimension of C. S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*

Magdalena Zegarlińska

Abstract

In *The Last Battle* (1956), C. S. Lewis echoes John Donne's question, 'What if this present were the world's last night?'¹ and presents his own vision of the Narnian apocalypse and life after death. He profoundly analyses characters' attitudes, motives for behaviour, and reactions when facing danger and death. Hence, the novel is very current; it covers the fears of each generation of humanity. The mood in which this novel – the final volume of *The Chronicles of Narnia* – commences is explicitly apocalyptic: 'In the last days of Narnia.'² Throughout the whole story, the motif of the end of the world recurs in words uttered by Jewel the Unicorn and repeated later on by Roonwit the Centaur: 'This is the end of all things'³ and 'all worlds draw to an end; except Aslan's own country.'⁴ According to Paul F. Ford, this story is an ideal example of an 'eschatological perspective,' defined as the study of 'eschata' in Christian theology – the awareness of one's life ending with four final things: death, judgement, hell and heaven.⁵ This chapter discusses Lewis's vision of the apocalypse and compares it to its Biblical predecessor in the Book of Revelation. Is the end of Narnia only a projection of a Christian creed? Or does Lewis supplement it with his own ideas?

Key Words: Apocalypse, death, eschatology, Lewis, Bible, Aslan, Narnia, Revelation, Last Battle.

1. Introduction

C. S. Lewis' *The Last Battle* is the last instalment of *The Chronicles of Narnia* series in which the author reflects upon such existential issues as death, faith, loyalty, the importance of proper conduct and finally the characters' attitudes towards the approaching apocalypse. In his vision Lewis has clearly employed a plethora of references to The Book of Revelation, yet delivered in a more accessible manner, suitable for his young readers. The following chapter aims to compare both texts and present the eschatological dimension of the Narnian saga.

2. Before the Apocalypse

Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* are deeply rooted in Christian tradition, which is confirmed by Chad Walsh in his foreword to *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis*: 'I found in Lewis an uncompromising exponent of no-nonsense theology, expressed with a rigour of mind and a graciousness of style, plus a soaring imagination.'⁶ Similarly, Ford acclaims Lewis for 'the successful attempt to remythologize the Christian creed'⁷: 'The story has a life on its own and it moves easily through the

eschatological themes of death, judgment, hell and heaven. It is not only the fitting conclusion to the *Chronicles*: Given Lewis' Christian faith, it is their only possible conclusion.⁸

The Narnian saga presents the story of Aslan's country from its genesis to its final day. The series starts with the creation of the world, proceeds with Aslan's death on the stone table, his resurrection, and finishes with the final battle and Narnia's destruction. Such a construction of the storyline plainly evokes the life of Jesus Christ. The Armageddon in *The Last Battle* is preceded by a series of meaningful events and signs which also correspond to the ones foreshadowing the Biblical apocalypse. In Aslan's absence, an ape called Shift becomes a false prophet calling itself 'the mouthpiece of Aslan.'⁹ In his name, the beast performs a number of foul deeds, using a donkey in lion's skin to impersonate The Great Lion. The Narnians, though obediently following the supposed Aslan's orders, are clearly disillusioned: 'Would it not be better to be dead than to have this horrible fear that Aslan has come and is not like the Aslan we believed in and longed for?'¹⁰ they cry. The motif of a false prophet, the Antichrist, was taken directly from the Book of Revelation: 'And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them [...] and them that worshipped his image.'¹¹ In Narnia the masses also become deceived and worship the false Aslan, though he turns out to be very different from what they expected him to be.

The dominant atmosphere, prior to the apocalypse, is the one of fear, doubt and despair. Faith and loyalty are challenged and a question of Aslan's true identity arises. His name is transformed into Tashlan (by mixing it with the Calormene God Tash) to convince the Narnians that both are only different notions signifying the same divine being, which is an allusion to the philosophy of Universalism.¹² Tash, Aslan's adversary, a hideous devilish creature, is dismissed by King Peter from Aslan's world to 'his own place,'¹³ presumably Hell. Narnians are torn between loyalty towards their King and the false Aslan, some of them choosing to support the latter in the final battle. Others still, namely the dwarfs, present an atheist attitude swearing that 'the dwarfs are for the dwarfs.'¹⁴ Their lack of belief becomes punished in the end; they are not able to see Aslan's country even after entering it. All they can perceive is the filth and odour of a stable, which will remain their permanent dwelling since the world outside is gone.¹⁵ The stable becomes their Platonic cave; shadows become real objects and eternal incarceration their lot: 'They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out,'¹⁶ says Aslan. It is important to note that neither Shift nor a Calormene leader Rishda believe in their Gods. They use them to control the masses with no fear of punishment for blasphemy. 'And this fool of an Ape, who didn't believe in Tash, will get more than he bargained for! He called for Tash: Tash has come. [...] People shouldn't call for demons unless they really mean what they say,'¹⁷ remarks

one of the dwarfs. The crisis of faith leads to an even greater confusion thereby leaving the Narnians without spiritual guidance and comfort that is usually obtained from religion. The Book of Revelation as well as the most famous prophecies also predict that the Doomsday will be foreshadowed by the fall of religion and the reverence of false prophets.

Another signal of an impending doom is the omnipresent despondency and questioning of all authorities. King Tirian, despite his righteousness and integrity, becomes disparaged, as he is slandered and falsely accused of treason by Shift and Rishda. Instead of preparing for battle in his royal castle, he is forced to hide in the woods and secretly assemble his troops. St. John's Apocalypse contains a parallel image: 'And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains.'¹⁸ With the subversion of authorities and utter disillusionment with religion, the Narnians no longer feel secure, resulting in general chaos and confusion exactly like in the Bible. At this point the situation is so hopeless that the impending doom appears to be inevitable which is an exact realisation of the eschatological theme.

The natural phenomenon which precedes both the Biblical and Narnian apocalypse is an earthquake. The earth shakes for the first time when Shift conceives his plot of turning Puzzle into the Aslan's impostor. The tremors recur when Shift and Rishda are punished for their misdemeanour and thrown into the stable,¹⁹ later when Aslan unsuccessfully tries to convert the dwarfs,²⁰ and finally when he growls at Emeth's question as to whether he and Tash are the same being.²¹ Thus, earth's shaking is the manifestation of Aslan's anger, just as in the Bible it is God's punishment sent onto the Earth. In the Book of Revelation the earthquake occurs a number of times, at first when the sixth seal is broken – 'I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake'²² – and later it follows the opening of the seventh one: 'And there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.'²³

3. The Apocalypse

The apocalypse is presented in the novel as a continuous, powerful process, the reversal of the act of creation described in chronologically the first volume of *The Chronicles of Narnia* entitled *The Magician's Nephew* (1955). On Narnia's first day Aslan created the sun, stars, mountains, plants and eventually animals, with his song of life. Some of them, on Aslan's command, became rational talking beasts. In *The Last Battle*, this sequence of events is reversed and gradually the whole world draws to its demise beginning with an epic battle between the Narnians and the Calormenes and ending in eternal darkness once more dawning on Narnia. Although extremely brave, most of Tirian's subjects are either killed in the battle or captured, and the king himself is driven into the dreaded stable. Inside, instead of a small confined space, he finds an enormous land where he encounters his friends,

even those he considered to be dead. Once they are safe, Aslan comes to the door and exclaims: 'Now it is time!' so loudly that the whole earth shakes, thereby commencing the destruction of the world.²⁴ At this command Father Time raises from his sleep and blows a giant horn emitting the sound which is 'high and terrible, yet of a strange deadly beauty.'²⁵ On hearing the call, stars (here being ethereal shiny creatures) begin falling from the sky.²⁶ As the process continues 'the starless patch begins to grow, spreading further and further from the centre of the sky [...] It was simply emptiness.'²⁷ This scene proves that Aslan is a master of the whole earth and heaven, able to create and destroy with only one word. Once stars are no longer illuminating the sky, the Last Judgement begins: 'And at last, out of the shadow of the trees, racing up the hill for dear life, by thousands and by millions, came all kinds of creatures [...] and all these ran up to the doorway where Aslan stood.'²⁸ Those who look at him with love are admitted through the door and those who express hatred or disbelief are deprived of their ability to speak (which they were given during the creation) and disappear into the darkness.²⁹ This scene closely resembles its Biblical predecessor: 'I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.'³⁰ Exactly like Christ, Aslan is an impartial judge rewarding those who remained faithful despite the confusion governing the world prior to his coming. Once the judgement is over, the entire flora is devoured by monster lizards and dragons that die and decompose afterwards: 'Minute by minute the forests disappeared. The whole country became bare.'³¹ When there is no life left, the sea rises and water inundates the remnants and bare lands. A huge, red dying Sun rises over the horizon and colours the water bloody red. The moon rises in an unusual place:

The sun also was dying. [...] Then the Moon came up, quite in her wrong position, very close to the sun [...] The sun began shooting out great flames, like whiskers or snakes of crimson fire. [...] The two ran together and became one huge ball like a burning coal.³²

Ultimately, at Aslan's command – 'Now make an end'³³ – the sun absorbs the moon and is squeezed by Father Time. This signals the advent of eternal darkness and Narnia's death. Everything, including time, ceases to exist. In this scene Lewis establishes the importance of divine providence and its inevitability. The world is destroyed despite the strong belief of Aslan's worshippers and the repentance of those who had previously sinned against him. The apocalypse becomes a pure manifestation of God's will. A number of congruous images are apparent in St John's Apocalypse, such as the rain of stars, the destruction of the sky, and the moon's death:

There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth. [...] And the heaven departed as a scroll; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.³⁴

The disappearance of lands is described in St John's Revelation as well: 'And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.'³⁵ Instead of a horn there are angels with trumpets whose voices cause various calamities to fall on the earth, yet here it is more a matter of punishment sent on people:

And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, [...] and the third part of the sea became blood; and there died the third part of the creatures.³⁶

Lewis' version is undoubtedly less drastic, since it was meant to be read mainly by children, yet it is enriched with an emotional tincture. The protagonists mourn over Narnia's end although they are offered a place in Aslan's country. Lewis presents their individual attitudes towards the apocalypse, which range from despair to a humble acceptance of Aslan's will. The latter attitude is best represented by Peter who says: 'Night falls on Narnia. What, Lucy! You're not *crying*? With Aslan ahead and all of us here?', whereas Lord Digory and Jill appear to be much less optimistic: "I did hope," said Jill, "that it might go on forever. I knew our world couldn't, I did think Narnia might." [...] "I saw it begin," said Lord Digory. "I did not think I would live to see it die."³⁷

Lewis presents a stoic attitude towards death among the Narnians, resembling classical epic and medieval chivalric stories. 'Noble death is a treasure which no one is too poor to buy,'³⁸ are the last words of the dying Roonwit. Only children feel a little uneasy about the prospect of dying, not being sure whether they will disappear from their own world as well. They do not yet know that what brought them to Narnia was a railway accident in which they were all killed. However, in *The Last Battle*, it is a feeling of nostalgia connected with Narnia's death that is predominant, instead of horror.

It is important to note that the Narnian apocalypse neither commenced as a form of a punishment sent onto the Narnians, nor as an outcome of an alien invasion (however, if we consider the Calormenes to be aliens, it can partially be true). Rather, it is a matter of divine providence; a natural phase in the Narnian history, and the realisation of Aslan's will.

4. After the Apocalypse

Once Narnia is gone, Aslan's eternal country, the land called 'The Real Narnia,' the Platonic 'overworld of self-subsisting ideas'³⁹ unveils itself to Aslan's worshippers on the other side of the stable door. It mirrors Biblical heaven: 'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.'⁴⁰ What is left outside, the dying Narnia, is called by Aslan 'The Shadowlands.'⁴¹ This, again, is an allusion to Plato's cave allegory. The Narnia the protagonists knew before ceases to exist, but it is only shadows that are gone, not the genuine country itself. Ford notices that Aslan's land possesses a quality once described by St. Thomas Aquinas: 'Were one able to go "further up and further in" – into the very mind and being of God – one would find not an utterly new reality but something strangely familiar, something "like" the world one had always known before, only supremely better,'⁴² which is exactly the property of Aslan's country. Following Plato and St. Augustine, in his preface to *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism* (1958), Lewis defines the notion of 'ascent of the soul' as 'a restless piercing desire for the unlimited source of all reality and perfection' experienced by the human heart and inspired by God's creation.⁴³ For this reason, in Aslan's country Jewel the Unicorn expresses his unlimited happiness: 'I have come home at last! This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now.'⁴⁴ By entering Aslan's realm, the protagonists fulfil the 'Platonic quest for reality,'⁴⁵ their souls make a full circle coming back to the eternal reality where they were created and are supposed to continue their journey to ultimate perfection.

Aslan's country is the land of love and grace where death and fear are ultimately defeated.⁴⁶ A similar motif can be found in the New Testament: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.'⁴⁷ It becomes the universal heaven for all believers. Even a Calormene Emeth finds his place by Aslan's side. His greatest desire was to meet Tash whom he eagerly served. Aslan explains to him that all good done to other creatures is performed in the name of Aslan and thus all evil is dedicated to Tash even if one thinks the opposite.⁴⁸ Thus, Aslan's world welcomes all good-hearted creatures, be it beasts or humans, regardless of their religion, as long as they were upright and faithful, which is not exactly the case in world's biggest religions where pagans are not admitted unless they convert.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, what is significant is that Lewis does not imagine the apocalypse as the end but rather as a change, a new beginning, and the first step in the pursuit of eternal joy:

But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning

Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read:
which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the
one before.⁴⁹

Instead of simply bringing his created world to an end, Lewis enriched his story with an extra theological dimension. Like the Bible, it is supposed to transmit the message that a proper conduct will guarantee us a place in heaven. Nevertheless, the main emphasis is on the adventures of particular characters, already well familiar to the readers of the saga, which provides a more individual approach to the themes of death and apocalypse. Although maintained within the conventions of children's literature, *The Last Battle* provides a serious and complex picture of the Armageddon, which deserves a thorough consideration. As Jadwiga Węgrodzka states, 'The inherent complexity of communicative situation should be a warning against dismissing children's literature per se as unworthy of critical attention.'⁵⁰ The solemnity and reverence of Lewis' vision, as well as a plethora of intertextual allusions, illustrate that *The Last Battle* deserves to have an established position within the canon of apocalyptic literature.

Notes

¹ John Donne, 'Holy Sonnet XIII', Luminarium, 10 April 2013, <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/sonnet13.php>.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1987), 7.

³ Ibid., 86.

⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁵ Paul F. Ford, *Companion to Narnia: A Complete Guide to the Magical World of C. S. Lewis's The Chronicles of Narnia*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 196.

⁶ Chad Walsh, Foreword to *The Image of Man in C. S. Lewis*, by William L. White (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969), 7.

⁷ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 353.

⁸ Ford, *The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 232-233.

⁹ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹¹ 'The Book of Revelation', *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 1999), 19:20.

¹² Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 97.

¹³ Ibid., 125.

¹⁴ Ibid., 100.

¹⁵ Ibid., 138.

- ¹⁶ Ibid., 140.
¹⁷ Ibid., 80-81.
¹⁸ The Book of Revelation, 6:15.
¹⁹ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 124.
²⁰ Ibid., 139.
²¹ Ibid., 154.
²² 'The Book of Revelation', 6:12.
²³ Ibid., 8:5.
²⁴ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 140.
²⁵ Ibid., 141.
²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Ibid., 142.
²⁸ Ibid., 143.
²⁹ Ibid., 144.
³⁰ 'The Book of Revelation', 7:9.
³¹ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 146.
³² Ibid., 148.
³³ Ibid.
³⁴ 'The Book of Revelation', 6:12-14.
³⁵ Ibid., 16:20.
³⁶ Ibid., 8:6-10.
³⁷ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 149.
³⁸ Ibid., 88.
³⁹ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 339.
⁴⁰ 'The Book of Revelation', 21:1.
⁴¹ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 171.
⁴² Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 340.
⁴³ C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), 7.
⁴⁴ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 161.
⁴⁵ Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, 341.
⁴⁶ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 162-163.
⁴⁷ 1 John, 4:18.
⁴⁸ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 154.
⁴⁹ Ibid., 172.
⁵⁰ Jadwiga Węgródzka, *Patterns of Enchantment: E. Nesbit and the Traditions of Children's Literature* (Sopot: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2007), 20.

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Apocalyptic Images of the Great War in Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* and Peyami Safa's *Mahşer*

Elif Derya Şenduran

Abstract

The Great War is an oxymoronic term because it combines greatness and mass death. Pro-war activities, glorifying the First World War of 1914-1918, led to an apocalyptic warfare. The United Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire were opponents during the Great War, and this chapter argues that the works of the British writer Vera Brittain (1893-1970) and the Turkish novelist Peyami Safa (1889-1961) illustrate oppositional perspectives of the First World War. Brittain's memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933) is a powerful attack on the false values of nationalism and militarism and their roots in patriarchy.¹ On the other hand, Safa's novel *Mahşer* (1924), meaning the place where people will gather together on the Day of Judgement, depicts the post-war period in Turkey from the perspective of a war veteran. Both *Testament of Youth* and *Mahşer* bring out the apocalyptic image of the Great War regarding the experience of people who have managed to survive. The thought of apocalypse emerges when people start to feel the decline and decay of the war. Brittain does not depict the Great War as a 'superlative tragedy'² when England declared war on August 3rd 1914. Instead, she states that the war was an 'interruption of the most exasperating kind of my personal plans.'³ The memoir reflects Brittain's change with the progress of war. She reveals the doomsday imagery with a feminist touch because her writings suggest that women have also suffered and worked hard for the fatal trench war. Alternatively, Safa's novel *Mahşer* depicts the catastrophic effects of the war, that is to say the obstacles and disappointments that the protagonist Nihad goes through after he has returned to İstanbul from the Battle of Gallipoli. Nihad's longing and nostalgia for İstanbul turns into hatred when he sees that the values he has fought for were violated by people. Sacrifice, virtue, and felicity are considered in vain by the public. Trust leaves its place to fear during the post-war period.

Key Words: Apocalypse, Great War, Vera Brittain, Peyami Safa, image, war, death, corruption, moral values, destruction.

1. Apocalypse and Literature of the Great War: *Testament of Youth* and *Mahşer*

All literary works are apocalyptic in the sense that each of them has an ending. Human beings need a closure, 'a sense of ending'⁴ in their lives. An apocalypse is a series of events that paves the way to the end of the world. Its origin is the Greek word 'apokalupsis' meaning to uncover, to reveal. The prophetic texts reveal the

apocalyptic events such as famine, pestilence, plagues, fire, flooding and the Day of Judgement. Both *Testament of Youth* and *Mahşer* are apocalyptic narratives; in other words they are eschatological, related to the last events of humankind. In the Middle Ages the meaning of apocalypse widened and became ‘total devastation or doom, or a large act of destruction’⁵ regardless of any religious text. The Great War led to mass destruction, pestilence, famine and fire, and a decline in moral values. Therefore, Brittain and Safa’s works vividly portray the consequences of the apocalyptic war.

2. Vera Brittain’s Encounter with the Great War and Her Apocalyptic Poetry

Vera Brittain’s autobiographical novel *Testament of Youth* is a powerful attack on the false values of nationalism, militarism and patriarchy. These false values bring out the apocalyptic images of death, mourning, corpses, death in life, agony, and desolation as a human being and a woman, ‘intimations of destructions, cataclysm.’⁶ Brittain writes the following lines about becoming a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse⁷ and her feelings regarding her fiancé, Roland’s, enlistment:

I shall hate it, but I will be all the more ready to do it on that account. [Roland] has to face far worse things than any sight or act I could come across; he can bear it – and so can I.⁸

Brittain was not aware of the possible results of the war when it started. In her poem ‘August, 1914’ written in 1914, Brittain retrospectively depicts the struggles experienced after the outbreak of war. She seems to have recognised the ironies of the war with these lines:

God said: “Men have forgotten Me;
The souls that sleep shall wake again,
And blinded eyes be taught to see.”

So since redemption comes through pain,
He smote the earth with chastening rod,
And brought destruction’s lurid reign;

But where His desolation trod,
The people in their agony
Despairing cried: “There is no God!”⁹

Brittain suggests that God brought the war as ‘Men have forgotten’ Him, while the sufferers of the war cry out: ‘There is no God!’ Brittain here refers to The Day

of Judgement when the dead resurrect. Conversely, this line of the poem also manifests an agnostic view of humanism as the belief in God is lost, although Brittain had deep religious beliefs during her childhood.¹⁰ The apocalyptic world view suggests that people are subject to a final judgement regarding the reward or punishment after death. There is a group of people in crisis and they need to be exhorted and consoled with respect to the apocalypse. Human beings cannot experience the apocalyptic hope of the Day of Judgement in eschatology.¹¹ That is why war victims cry out in desolation and agony despairingly in Brittain's poem.

Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is also a love story, in which Brittain sees her personal life as representative of her generation, relating the private to the public.¹² The apocalyptic image of war represents itself as a troublemaker for the two lovers. The war prevents the romance with an unendurable pain of separation in the form of death which brings the tragic and inevitable end to this love story.¹³

In *Testament of Youth* Brittain reveals her feelings about Roland's death with her poem 'Perhaps' (1916) as follows:

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of You.¹⁴

Brittain wrote poetry throughout the war because she was inspired by Roland who also expressed himself through poetry. In 'Perhaps' she writes movingly about her mourning after Roland's death.¹⁵ The poem presents the results of the war such as the suffering of waiting young women whose loved ones do not return.¹⁶ That is to say, women also encountered the apocalyptic impact of the Great War with the pressure felt after the loved one's death. The destruction of the 'greatest joy' and the loss of Roland are further emphasised in the last stanza:

But though kind Time may many joys renew,
There is one greatest joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of You
Was broken, long ago.¹⁷

After Roland's death, Brittain could not decide whether to leave the VAD service or not. At last she decided to remain as a VAD nurse, thinking of her brother Edward who was sent to France six weeks after Roland's death.¹⁸ Brittain also decided to go on a foreign service as a VAD nurse to Malta.¹⁹ Her poem 'We Shall Come No More' (1932) reflects her thoughts about the war and her loss while she was in Malta. She encounters a life in death situation. The walking of the dead again is a visual apocalyptic imagery representing the Day of Judgement in which the dead would resurrect to reckon for their sins:

O Captain of our Voyage,
 What of the Dead?
 Dead days, dead hopes, dead loves, dead dreams, dead sorrows –
 O Captain of our Voyage,
 Do the dead walk again?²⁰

However, Brittain's sorrowful days were not over. First, she lost her friend Victor. Later her brother died, soon after she had written him a poem called 'To My Brother' (1918). This poem is significant because it reflects the idea that survival must be achieved. It is a woman's burden and privilege to look after the new generation and never forget the lost generation. The lost generations' wounds, both physical and spiritual, have scarred the women's hearts forever, as Brittain states in her poem 'To My Brother'²¹:

Your battle-wounds are scars upon my heart,
 Received when in that grand and tragic "show"
 You played your part
 Two years ago.²²

Written just before Brittain's brother Edward was killed 'Your battle wounds are scars upon my heart' is her sorrowful recollection of the wounds Edward got in the Battle of Somme.²³

Having experienced the apocalyptic aspect of war psychologically, suffering from loneliness and panic, self-doubt and even from depression throughout her life, Brittain had resilience and a good-natured curiosity about the world. She was cruelly mocked by the students at the Somerville debate because of her war service when she returned to Oxford. She saw the antagonism between the ones who suffered deeply in the war and the ones who did not suffer. This created another apocalypticism between the two generations. The apocalyptic total war including mass mobilisation, military organisation, and mass killing became modern. That is to say, the fragments of disparity integrated to form the 'Empire of Modernity'²⁴ with respect to the introduction of apocalyptic thoughts that triggered the civilians and soldiers' adverse attitudes to each other. Brittain's post-war poem 'The Lament of the Demobilised' (1920) reflects the antagonism between the war generation and post-war Oxford:

"Four years," some say consolingly. "Oh well,
 What's that? You're young. And then it must have been
 A very fine experience for you!"
 And they forget
 How others just stayed behind and just got on –

...

And no one talked heroics now, and we
 Must just go back and start again once more.
 “You threw your years into the melting pot –
 Did you indeed!” these others cry. “Oh well,
 The more fool you!
 And we’re beginning to agree with them.”²⁵

It is also ironic that women could not define themselves as the ‘war generation’ at that time. That is why Brittain wrote ‘The Lament of the Demobilised’ from a young man’s point of view. VAD nurses’ contribution to the war had always been underestimated.²⁵

On the other hand, one of the results of the war was the excessive female population. Indirectly, this is a sign of the end of the world because the reproduction rate decreases due to this unbalance in population. Brittain, before her marriage, wrote ‘The Superfluous Woman’ (1920) which represents her protest for the non-fulfilment of lamenting single women’s vow for marriage. Children also suffered from grief and loss. Young girls were also devastated as they could not find lovers who would give them children:²⁶

Light fading where the chimneys cut the sky;
 Footsteps that pass,
 Nor tarry at my door.
 And fade away,
 Behind the raw of crosses, shadows black
 Stretch out long arms before the smouldering sun.

But who will give me my children?²⁷

As Brittain suggests in *Testament of Youth*, the surviving females in the war were regarded as superfluous. This surplus of women had been discredited and weakened by the patriarchal order.²⁸ On the other hand, she illustrates the invalidity of being superfluous when she puts forth the probable apocalypse of human generation by emphasising the significance of women’s reproductive quality.

3. Allusions of Apocalypse in Peyami Safa’s *Mahşer*

The Final Judgment has developed an apocalyptic narrative forming a terrifying sequence of events. The decay of values and faith will be the beginning of the punishment of human souls.²⁹ Peyami Safa is a witness of the last days of the Ottoman Empire. At that time, the two civilisations were clashing and the Western civilisation was the dominant one,³⁰ and the effects of this can be observed in his novel, *Mahşer* (1924). This narrative depicts the destruction of moral values during

the aftermath of war. Safa puts forth the apocalyptic images of the effects of the Great War on Turkish society in a down-to-earth style.

The first page of *Mahşer* portrays the visual apocalyptic imagery of Istanbul foreshadowing Nihad's future encounter with corruption and false moral values regarding the Western influence on Turkish family life and deterioration in civil services:

As the ferryboat proceeded, the stone buildings at the left and right banks shed through the darkness smearing, walked towards the ferryboat with their vigorous and dark bodies moving slowly, swelling, heaving, rising with an increasing majesty as if they were standing up. Over Istanbul, in the middle of the Marmara, from San Stefano [Yeşilköy] onwards, there is an eye catching fire-like crimson colour; the clusters of clouds that absorb the whole light of the city, like flaming rags, are scarlet.³¹

The visual imagery – darkness, flames, and crimson colour – indicate an introduction to the Day of Judgement regarding the title of the novel. The darkness of the buildings can be associated with the corrupt apartment life in Beyoğlu, opposite the Mir tailor shop where Nihad was able to find a job, although with difficulty. Ironically the apartment is white despite its dark connotations. The would-be owners of the flat, Mahir and Seniha, had in fact seized the ownership of the flat illegally from the real inheritor Muazzez. Thus, Safa portrays the corruption of family life under the influence of Western modernism vividly through the visual imagery with opposing colours: white and black, juxtaposing the darkness of the fake owners and the real inheritor Muazzez's naivety regarding the white apartment.

Nihad, longing to reunite with his homeland, Istanbul, soon feels the pressure of corruption as he seeks for the meaning of 'homeland,' 'nation,' and 'virtue'³² which he has fought for at the battle of Gallipoli. Similarly, Safa questions the reasons for war in his book *Nasyonalizm* [Nationalism] (1961). He concludes that wars do not come out of nations but nations come out of wars.³³

Having returned from war, Nihad becomes a tutor for Mahir and Seniha's daughter who wants to study foreign languages rather than Turkish. He is later persuaded to be an accountant for the promiscuous Seniha after his desperate efforts to find a job. However, the corrupted lifestyle of the family puts pressure on him because he realises that the three values he has fought for for three years in Gallipoli – 'homeland,' 'nation,' and 'virtue' – were the names of clowns.³⁴ Safa mentions the dilemma Nihad goes through in his book *Reflections on the Turkish Revolution* (1999): 'The roots of modernism bind us to European thought ... the roots of nationalism guide us to Central Asia, to our ancestral origins, history and unity of language.'³⁵ The clash of modernism and the traditional values of the

individual make Nihad confused and desperate in *Mahşer*. Thus, throughout the novel, he tries to escape from the apocalyptic visions of chaos. Being a veteran, he revolts his faith as follows:

I came to İstanbul from war supposedly in order to feel at ease. The fight here is hundred times worse than the fight there. There, the person is either shot from the centre of his forehead, sits still or mutilated, stays alive. After that, no excitement. The end of the issue is obvious. Is it like this here? The result is ambiguous. Running towards the unknown to the utmost.³⁶

The ambiguity of life in Istanbul can be associated with the pressure Nihad feels in his homeland. Orphaned at an early age, Nihad has nobody to rely on except for himself and Muazzez, who he falls deeply in love with. Nihad encounters a death in life situation while he is waiting for Muazzez in front of her apartment to run away because Mahir and Seniha force her to marry a member of parliament called Alaaddin, who has been sleeping with Seniha for the sake of Mahir's business matters:

The last stage of weakness. Death, death in life. Aa..h, there is no body at these times. The universe becomes dark, eye and ear are senseless, strange, vague, indistinct gleams lengthening and shortening endure instead of light and instead of sound the howling of the wind that strikes a dome endures.³⁷

On the other hand, Nihad feels emasculated when he is not able to find a job to take care for his wife Muazzez and pay the rent. Therefore, he becomes rebellious, stating that leading a virtuous life does not help him to make ends meet. Ironically, he starts to translate texts for Alaaddin's newspaper. The following lines depicting Nihad's feelings are certainly the reflection of the thought of apocalypse after the war of Gallipoli: 'İstanbul has become so filthy that, death is the unique beauty and peace. Wars and revolutions one after the other signify that.'³⁸ In addition to all these unfortunate events, Muazzez becomes seriously ill.³⁹ Seeing death as peace, Nihad cries out for revolution but this wish ends up in prison:

Nihad was looking at this awful human nature in the seventh circle of hell like a lunatic, not understanding, several times, he realised the torment of people that were put in grave alive; he thought whether it was worse than this or not.⁴⁰

The images of light and sound go hand in hand with the extended metaphor of the place of the Day of Judgement, *Mahşer*. A death in life situation can also be

associated with the judgement day as dead people would rise from their graves to reckon. These events illustrate the moral decay in the society due to the war. It gives the impression that the end is near.⁴¹ The pressure of moral decay and the outcomes of war make Nihad recognise the apocalypse in İstanbul.

Safa once again resorts to apocalyptic imagery of violence to emphasise Nihad's feelings when he is put in prison due to his wish for a revolution. The prisoners were violently hitting the new prisoner to steal his money.⁴² Muazzez leaves Nihad to stay in Seniha's flat for a few days after Nihad is released from prison. Nihad's loathsome thoughts for his surroundings increase as he lies in his room alone wishing to be dead: 'He is angry at people struggling, running for temporary interests, wandering on earth... Despite all these disasters, why do they insist on scuffling?'⁴³ These rhetorical questions arise due to Muazzez's egocentrism that Nihad feels as she longs for the comfort she used to have. Thus, he would like to die temporarily because he loves life. Temporal death may also evoke the imagery of the Day of Judgement when the dead will resurrect for reckoning.

His second abandonment by Muazzez paves the way to his suicide attempt. However, he runs away from death and he is stopped by a moaning body lying on the ground, a soldier from the Turkish army. The soldier is hungry and Nihad gives him some bread. He has also fought in the same front, at the same time in Çanakkale. The soldier expresses his desperate situation as follows: 'The government did not take care of us. It made life miserable for us.'⁴⁴ The soldier's remarks illustrate the post-war period and its effects on soldiers who have managed to survive. The Gallipoli Campaign not only resulted in the death of many soldiers on both sides but the aftermath of this war continued for a long time, with the consequence of unbearable lives of surviving soldiers.

Then, Nihad remembers his arrival in İstanbul and how it looked like a fire from a distance like *Mahşer* – the place where people would gather on the Day of Judgement. On the other hand, the ending of the novel is optimistic, bringing out a hope for the future. Nihad and Muazzez reconcile by the help of Kerim, a novelist who also proposes a promising job to Nihad. Early in the morning, Nihad and Muazzez experience the sight of crimson colour of the sun arising between the hills in Üsküdar.⁴⁵

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* reflects the unseen realities of the war from a woman's perspective. Her writing does not represent 'apocryphal apocalypses.'⁴⁶ The apocalyptic encounters such as the loss of a lover and a brother did not let Brittain be inactive during the war. Like her, women were mobilised. They also took their right to vote. They started to work at different jobs, doing 'men's' work. The apocalypse of a generation meant a new beginning for women. As Brittain's poems suggest, women too suffered during the war, yet their

sufferings were not credited among men. Brittain's experience of the war and her pacifism growing with internationalism can also be seen as an example for the coming generations to stop wars. On the other hand, *Mahşer* portrays the aftermath of war and the last days of an Empire, alluding to the apocalyptic images, to create a death in life situation for the veteran who tries to survive in a morally corrupted society. Both Vera Brittain and the protagonist Nihad in *Mahşer* have gone through the disastrous effects of the Great War as the two books demonstrate. The mass deaths led to the apocalypse of moral values, living conditions, and traditions. Thus, the two different perspectives offered by two writers of different sexes and from opposing countries during the war share the same thoughts on the apocalypse in their writing.

Notes

¹ Jean E. Kennard, *Vera Brittain & Winifred Holtby: A Working Partnership* (London: New England University Press, 1989), 125.

² Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Virago Press, 1978), 18.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Douglas Robinson, 'Literature and Apocalyptic', in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Stephen Stein, Vol. 3 (New York: Continuum, 2000), 360.

⁵ Mary Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post Politics: The Romance of the End* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008), 42.

⁶ Robinson, 'Literature and Apocalyptic', 361.

⁷ Kennard, *Vera Brittain & Winifred Holtby*, 125.

⁸ Fred Crawford, *British Poets of the Great War* (London: Associated University Press, 1988), 151.

⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 94.

¹⁰ Muriel Mellown, 'One Woman's Way to Peace: The Development of Vera Brittain's Pacifism', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, No. 2 (1985): 217.

¹¹ John J. Collins, 'From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End', in *Apocalypticism*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Collins and Stephen Stein (New York: Continuum, 2003), 86.

¹² Kennard, *Vera Brittain & Winifred Holtby*, 125.

¹³ Linda Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997), 92.

¹⁴ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 239.

¹⁵ Deborah Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 109.

¹⁶ Kennard, *Vera Brittain & Winifred Holtby*, 145.

¹⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 239.

¹⁸ Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, 109.

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- ¹⁹ Ibid., 110.
- ²⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 291.
- ²¹ Joan Montgomery Byles, *War Women, and Poetry, 1914-1915* (London: Associated University Press, 1995), 69.
- ²² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 434.
- ²³ Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, 128.
- ²⁴ John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 133.
- ²⁵ Gorham, *Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life*, 148.
- ²⁶ Nosheen Khan, *Women's Poetry of the First World War* (New York: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1998), 175.
- ²⁷ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 535.
- ²⁸ Anderson, *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century*, 100.
- ²⁹ Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Apocalypse in Islam*, trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), xix.
- ³⁰ Ergun Göze, *Peyami Safa* (Ankara: Kültür Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1987), 27 [my translation].
- ³¹ Peyami Safa, *Mahşer* (İstanbul: Ötüken, 2012), 7 [my translation].
- ³² Ibid., 55 [my translation].
- ³³ Peyami Safa, *Nasyonalizm* (İstanbul: Babiali Yayınevi, 1961), 84 [my translation].
- ³⁴ Safa, *Mahşer*, 55 [my translation].
- ³⁵ Peyami Safa, *Reflections on the Turkish Revolution*, trans. Prof. Yuluğ Tekin Kurat (Ankara: Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu Matbaası, 1999), 56.
- ³⁶ Safa, *Mahşer*, 128 [my translation].
- ³⁷ Ibid., 136 [my translation].
- ³⁸ Ibid., 227 [my translation].
- ³⁹ Ibid., 234 [my translation].
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 239 [my translation].
- ⁴¹ David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 8.
- ⁴² Safa, *Mahşer*, 242 [my translation].
- ⁴³ Ibid. [my translation].
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 259 [my translation].
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 295 [my translation].
- ⁴⁶ Robinson, 'Literature and Apocalyptic', 361.

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Part 6

The Apocalypse in Contemporary Film and Television

The End of the World of the End: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* and Political Theory

Milo Sweedler

Abstract

I argue in this chapter that Lars von Trier's 2011 film *Melancholia* can be read as an allegory of two contrasting ways of conceiving the end of time. On the one hand, the depiction of the idleness of the characters, a group of wealthy jetsetters whose petty intrigues form the first narrative thread of the film, can be perceived as a portrayal of the 'end of history.' This idea of the end of history was initially theorised by Alexandre Kojève in his influential lectures on G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but it is primarily the subsequent elaboration of the idea by Francis Fukuyama in his 1992 manifesto of the post-ideological world of triumphant neoliberalism, *The End of History and the Last Man*, that will be of interest here. I argue that von Trier's detailed narration of his characters' frivolous adventures and his patient probing into their banal concerns serve to convey the vacuous existence of these super-rich trend setters, who are presented as so many Nietzschean 'last men' living in a Fukuyaman post-historical paradise. On the other hand, the second narrative thread, involving the imminent demise of the Earth, presents an apocalyptic vision of the end of human time. Although this end of the world, brought about by the collision of a rogue planet with Earth, is presented in von Trier's film as an arbitrary astrological event, I would suggest that this event can be read symptomatically, almost as a wish fulfilment condensing discontent with the Fukuyaman post-political world and wilfully bringing about its conflagration in vivid colour. If the first narrative thread, which I dub 'the world of the end,' finds its theoretical counterpart in the works of Kojève and Fukuyama, the second, which I call 'the end of the world of the end,' finds its theoretical analogue in Walter Benjamin's notion of divine violence and especially in Slavoj Žižek's appropriation of this powerful and provocative Benjaminian category.

Key Words: Apocalypse, Walter Benjamin, divine violence, end of history, Francis Fukuyama, Alexandre Kojève, *Melancholia*, political theory, Lars von Trier, Slavoj Žižek.

'Always historicize!' Fredric Jameson exhorts in the preface to his 1981 book *The Political Unconscious*.¹ The present chapter proposes an attempt at a historicising reading of the type Jameson calls for. The cultural artefact that I propose to analyse here is Lars von Trier's apocalyptic vision of the end of the world in his 2011 film *Melancholia*. To say that this film belongs to a larger cultural trend strikes me as an understatement. One could cite the burgeoning

production of graphic novels, films, television shows, video games and smart phone applications in which any number of human, semi-human or extraterrestrial aliens threaten human existence in its current form. Alternatively, one might evoke the proliferation in the media of eschatological predictions of cataclysmic events, speculations on impending biospheric disasters and musings on human obsolescence by digital or biogenetic means. The accumulation of these and related examples bears witness to something of an obsession with imagining the end of the world as we know it. The current chapter offers an interpretation of this cultural phenomenon by situating an example of the trend in its historical context. Although the chapter remains focused on one particular film, it proposes a periodising hypothesis of sorts, which goes beyond the limited confines of a single film by a particular filmmaker to hazard an explanation for why the end-times are so fashionable in our own time.

The perspective from which I read von Trier's film is resolutely political. If I more or less bracket here the psychoanalytic, existential, feminist (or misogynist), metaphysical and mythic dimensions of the film in favour of a political reading, I do so for two reasons. First, although I find Jameson's affirmation that the political interpretation of texts is 'the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation' hyperbolic, I do agree with him that 'the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not' fails to account for the deep penetration of politics into private life.² Such a distinction, which tacitly sanctions the idea that the individual artist or lone genius can somehow transcend his or her conjuncture, reinforces, intentionally or not, the fundamentally ideological idea that some of us are outside of ideology. In sum, I agree with Jameson that cultural artefacts, whether they are explicitly 'political' or not, can profitably be read as socially symbolic acts bearing witness to a 'political unconscious.' Second, I would argue that *Melancholia* is above all a political film, belonging to the first category of cultural texts Jameson names: those that have explicitly social or political content. Although I do not mean to imply that the other aspects of the film (psychological, existential, metaphysical and so forth) are irrelevant in and of themselves, I will argue that the political reading of the film renders them irrelevant.

Melancholia is a rigorously structured film, divided into a prologue of about eight minutes and two discrete parts of exactly one hour each. The prologue juxtaposes a series of super-slow-motion shots of the characters in situations to which the film returns in the later narrative segments. One sees Justine (Kirsten Dunst) dressed sometimes in the wedding dress she wears in the first part of the film and sometimes in the jeans and T-shirt she sports in the second part. Justine's sister Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg) and Claire's son Leo (Cameron Spurr) are seen trudging painfully slowly through a golf course. A shot of Breugel's *Hunters in the Snow* appears enhanced with computer-generated images of birds gracefully dropping out of the sky. A horse gently but inexorably collapses. Planets move past

each other and then collide, completely destroying the smaller planet, Earth, as it collapses into the larger, and so forth. This opening sequence, set to the overture of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, condenses the central motifs of the film into a series of beautifully framed tableaux. Virtually all of the images in the prologue find an analogous moment in the body of the film, up to and including the collision of the two planets that consumes the biosphere in the film's final frame.

This prologue gives pause for thought. In an industry that places so much emphasis on producing audience-pleasing endings, von Trier's decision to begin the film by divulging the apocalyptic end flies in the face of one of the central tenets of narrative cinema: that the film should present a satisfying resolution to the narrative problems it raises.³ If our main interest in the film lay in discovering what happened at the end, there would be no point in watching it. We know from the get-go how the story ends: the Earth is demolished; no one survives.

This revelation of the cataclysmic end right from beginning also produces the effect of making everything that follows seem pointless. The permutations of Justine's battle with depression are irrelevant given the imminent demise of the planet. The tensions between her and her newlywed husband become insignificant. Her conflict with her bigwig employer, the mixed emotions expressed between her and both her embittered mother and her alcoholic father, her emotional and physical dependence on a sister she disdains, and all of the myriad problems the heroine faces over the course of the film are revealed to be ultimately meaningless. All of these narrative tensions, which the film patiently and probingly explores over the course of two hours, have been stripped of their significance for the viewer who has already seen that all of this amounts to naught.

In a similar vein, von Trier's film style also undermines the viewer's interest in the development of the plot. Let us take an example. Following the prologue, the film narrative begins with a three-minute sequence of a limousine attempting to navigate its way along a winding dirt road. We see the car alternately inching forward and reversing while first the chauffeur, then Justine and her husband-to-be Michael (Alexander Skarsgaard) each try to move the limo past a tight bend in the road. This light-hearted sequence, shot in a *Dogme 95* style with a hand-held camera, natural lighting and direct sound, in which Justine and Michael playfully interact with each other while the chauffeur nervously frets about his car, ends as abruptly as it begins, without showing whether the travellers overcome their obstacle. The sequence is followed without transition by a shot of the bride and groom walking up a driveway to a château, where the wedding party awaits them. One assumes that they had to abandon the car on the road and hike the several miles to meet the wedding party (the change from one sequence to the next from daylight to night-time buttresses this interpretation), but one does not know and, frankly, does not really care. In contrast to similar uses of this montage technique, here the imbalance between the three-minute sequence during which effectively

nothing happens and the elliptical cut where the conflict is presumably resolved serves to undermine more than to generate our interest in the narrative.⁴

One could multiply examples of this sort. Von Trier's particular use of the jump-cut, for instance, is the audio-visual equivalent of 'etcetera.' His propensity to open scenes with establishing shots *away* from which he immediately pans leads more to creating a sense of spatial confusion than to orienting the viewer in the narrative space. The resolutely anti-climactic structure of the film is merely the most obvious example of von Trier's assault on cinematic conventions. However, if these breaches of cinematic conventions have the general effect of undermining the spectator's interest in the development of the narrative, von Trier's probing camera, which lingers patiently on characters' faces in ways that invite us to enter into their inner world, produces the opposite effect. The result is a film characterised at the same time by an unfathomable profundity and an off-the-cuff superficiality.

One might propose a similar interpretation of the cataclysmic event that devours the world at the end of the film. In and of itself, such a conflagration would constitute the most decisive event in human history. But its function in the film can also be perceived as a cheap *deus ex machina* (a plot device whereby narrative problems are suddenly and abruptly resolved by the contrived intervention of some new event). The annihilation of the world at the end of the film absolves von Trier of the responsibility of resolving or even seriously addressing the grave issues of human existence he evokes in the film.

If von Trier fails to shed much light on the deep metaphysical and existential questions that his film constantly invites us to ponder, the way an Ingmar Bergman or an Andrei Tarkovsky might, his film does lend itself to a far-reaching socio-political analysis. Indeed, following a Sartrean sort of 'loser wins' logic, one might argue that *Melancholia* succeeds in transmitting a socially and politically significant message to the precise extent that it fails to plumb the existential and metaphysical depths that it hints are just below the film's surface.⁵

The socio-political message of the film can be gleaned from a juxtaposition of its two main narrative segments. The first part of the film, called 'Justine' after the character whose manically depressive nature gets the better of her, leading her to abandon her picture-perfect husband on their wedding night, quit her high-powered job in an advertising firm and have a 30-second sexual encounter (filmed in real time) with an insignificant minor character, depicts one night in the life of a dysfunctional upper-class family. The décor is an opulent waterfront mansion with meticulously manicured grounds, complete with an eighteen-hole golf course, owned by Claire's super-rich husband John (Kiefer Sutherland). The attire of the characters and the activities in which the wedding guests engage are in keeping with their ostentatious surroundings. Their fashionable clothing and especially the frivolous but ever-so-tasteful activities organised for the wedding party (the launch of fire balloons into the night sky, a midnight snack of onion soup served by a team

of servants in black tie at a bleached-white tent set up for the purpose and so forth) leave no doubt as to the family's social status. The film goes over the top in its depiction of the excesses of upper-class life. One almost feels as though one was watching an episode of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*.

The latter show, which aired from 1984 to 1995 on American syndicated television, is a phenomenon of its times, spanning the transition from the Reagan-Bush years of the 1980s that saw the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the United States as the world's only super-power to the Clintonite 90s of bull markets, booming stock prices and flush shareholders. There are many ways one might characterise this period of burgeoning global capitalism and the export of Western-style democracy throughout the world. Perhaps the most compelling description of this era is the one proposed by Francis Fukuyama in his manifesto of the concomitant triumphs of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy in his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*.

The overarching argument of Fukuyama's book is that the historical process, which began when the mythical 'first men' engaged in armed combat for recognition by their opponents, has reached its endpoint. The argument draws heavily upon Alexandre Kojève's influential reading of Hegel's theory of Universal History, proposed in a series of lectures at the École des Hautes Études in Paris between 1933 and 1939 during which Kojève read aloud and commented on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) line by line. According to the interpretation of Universal History that Kojève puts forth in these lectures, history as such came to an end in 1806, when Napoléon Bonaparte, whom Hegel apparently saw ride past his house in Jena, marched triumphantly through Europe spreading what Kojève calls 'the universal and homogeneous state.'⁶ According to Fukuyama's updated version of this theory of the 'end of history,' the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc in the late 1980s reflects:

the achievement of a higher level of rationality on the part of those who lived in such societies, and their realization that rational universal recognition could be had only in a liberal social order.⁷

In sum, neoliberal economics and liberal-democratic politics represent 'the end point of human ideological evolution beyond which it [is] impossible to progress further.'⁸ History is over; all that remains is the 'dénouement': the slow but inexorable colonisation of the remaining pockets of resistance to global liberal capitalism.

I will return below to critique this Fukuyaman thesis and weigh its relevance in a post-9/11 context, but I must say that I fundamentally agree with Slavoj Žižek's assessment of the ongoing validity of Fukuyama's analysis as a descriptive model for understanding contemporary global developments:

It is easy to make fun of Fukuyama's notion of the End of History, but the dominant ethos today is "Fukuyaman": liberal-democratic capitalism is accepted as the finally found formula of the best possible society.⁹

One may dislike Fukuyama's treatise or object to his smug tone, but it is hard to argue with the fact that the world does seem to be approaching something of a consensus that, as Žižek says in another context, multinational neoliberalism is 'the only game in town.'¹⁰

It is a visual crystallisation of this post-historical world that the first part of *Melancholia* offers to the viewer. The fact that Justine works in the area of advertising, a post-historical profession if ever there was one, strikes me as a non-negligible detail. The image that we see of Justine's professional work leaves little doubt of the value that the film attributes to this sort of work. Justine's job would appear to consist primarily if not exclusively in coming up with tag-lines to accompany images (the one we see is that of three scantily clothed anorexic young women sprawled provocatively across a blue tile surface). Although Justine's cynical summary of her professional work (summed up in the question: 'How do we effectively hook a group of minors on our substandard product, preferably in a habit-forming way?') is a hodgepodge of clichés that work at cross-purposes, the very excess of her critique seems designed to persuade the film audience of the evils of advertising and elicit the viewer's disdain for the slice of life portrayed on the screen.

The second part of the film, misleadingly titled 'Claire,' during which Justine and her sister Claire wait, with a heightened sense of anxiety on Claire's part and resigned acceptance on Justine's, for the collision of a rogue planet called Melancholia with the Earth, stands as the radical antithesis to the first part. If the first narrative segment, which one might dub 'the world of the end,' presents the post-historical world, the second offers the spectacle of the annihilation of this world.

I would read the cataclysmic event portrayed at the end of *Melancholia*, which brings about the end of the world of the end, as an image of the sort of the expiating violence that Walter Benjamin cryptically calls 'divine violence' in his 1922 essay 'Critique of Violence.' This obscure Benjaminian category has generated an enormous amount of ink over the past few decades, giving rise to lively exchanges among such major thinkers as Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler and most recently, Simon Critchley and Žižek. For my purposes here, I will refer only to the remarks of Žižek, who proposes that 'we should fearlessly identify divine violence with positively existing historical phenomena, thus avoiding any obscurantist mystification.'¹¹

Žižek poses 'divine violence' as the counterforce to what he calls 'objective' or 'systemic' violence. The latter form of violence, 'the violence inherent in the

system,' includes 'not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation.'¹² Divine violence, then, would be a sort of 'Return to Sender,' a violence that turns systemic violence back in an inverted form on the system that produced it. So understood, divine violence would be a symptom, in the medical or psychoanalytic sense of the term, of the systemic violence necessary to maintain the way of life of those who benefit from a given socio-economic configuration. In contrast to other forms of contestation, which may conceive of violence as a means to an end, divine violence 'serves no means, not even that of punishing the culprits and thus re-establishing the equilibrium of justice. It is just a sign of the injustice of the world.'¹³

I would argue that the cataclysmic finale of *Melancholia* offers the viewer a spectacle of such apparently gratuitous destruction. Like Benjaminian divine violence, which strikes 'without warning, without threat, and does not stop short of annihilation,' the destruction of the Earth at the end of the film serves no purpose other than to stand as a complete and utter negation of the world portrayed on the screen.¹⁴

One need only re-insert the film into its socio-historical context for the relevance of such an analysis to become immediately apparent. *Melancholia* came out in 2011, the year that gave rise to such widely diverse expressions of discontent with the New World Order as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, the UK riots and Anders Behring Breivik's murderous rampage. Žižek dubs 2011 'the year of dreaming dangerously,'¹⁵ while Alain Badiou cites the year's events as evidence of what he calls, in a phrase that should be heard with its full anti-Fukuyaman resonance, 'the rebirth of history.'¹⁶ In relation to riots like the ones that took place in England in August of that year, Žižek writes that 'if the commonplace that we live in a post-ideological era has any sense at all, it is here, in these ongoing outbursts of violence, that it becomes discernible.'¹⁷ Drawing a general conclusion from this particular example, Žižek proposes that 'the more a society conforms to a well-organized rational state, the more the abstract negativity of "irrational" violence returns.'¹⁸ It is to such a sad state of affairs, I would argue, that *Melancholia* bears witness.

If *Melancholia* offers no viable alternative to the decadent world it portrays on the screen, if the only solution it proposes to the dead-end of post-history is a makeshift *deus ex machina* that engulfs the world, this lack of political imagination may itself be a sign of the times. At a moment when the only serious challenge to the capitalist-parliamentary world order is posed by the resurgence of religious fundamentalisms whose worldviews constitute, in my view, a retrogressive return to a significantly less progressive social model than the one they are combating, where do critics of the inexorable advances of global capitalism turn? As the avenues for substantial social change are progressively closed off by the hegemony of multinational capital and the liberal-democratic institutions that support it, the political imagination is thwarted in its attempt to imagine a viable alternative. It is

finally, perhaps, this political impasse to which the proliferation of apocalyptic visions of the end of the world, of which von Trier's *Melancholia* would be emblematic, attests.

Notes

¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 17 and 20.

³ The film industry's obsession with producing audience-pleasing endings is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the questionnaires circulated by movie studios at advance film screenings. Roughly half of these questionnaires, at least in the case of the advance screening I attended, are dedicated to checking whether the sample audience finds the ending satisfying.

⁴ For a compelling alternate reading of this sequence, see Marta Figlerowicz, 'Comedy of Abandon: Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*', *Film Quarterly* 65, No. 4 (2012): 23. My appreciation of von Trier's aesthetic owes a debt to Figlerowicz's insightful article.

⁵ For a reading of the *topos* of 'loser wins' in Sartre's work, see Philip Knee, *Qui Perd Gagne: Essai sur Sartre* (Laval: Presses Universitaires de Laval, 1993).

⁶ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Alan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 44.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 205.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 421.

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, 'Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!', *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2000), 95.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2009), 196-197.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 1: 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2004), 250.

¹⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012).

¹⁶ Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2012).

¹⁷ Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 53.

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The Stolen Child: Fear of Hybridisation and Metamorphosis in American Apocalyptic Film

Shane Trayers

Abstract

Losing a child is a parent's worst nightmare, second only perhaps to being unable to protect a child from harm. Recent apocalyptic films have combined several fears in the form of the contaminated, hybrid child. This analysis focuses on those children characters whose childhoods are hijacked by outside forces. The stolen child is fundamentally changed by aliens, technologically created viruses, or other processes. When returned, as they typically are, the child is only half-human and half an 'other' that we fear. The child's enhanced abilities, sometimes strangely altered appearance, and the probability of more humans falling victim to the same metamorphosis give rise to audience abjection. This transformation seems indicative of a 'post-human' era in that the child is representative of the end of the 'human' race as we know it, but he or she is also a beginning. Through their hybridity, these children combat American xenophobia, simultaneously reassure parents that 'special' children are important, and show that it is only through progress and change that life on this planet can flourish. Although these depictions begin with the worst we can imagine, works like *Falling Skies* (2011) move past the horror by demonstrating the healing power of the hybrid child, and illustrate that the multicultural and multiracial nature of humanity is a strength in American society. Through a plot crisis, these children demonstrate their value and what the audience experiences is therapeutic. What we most feared saves us all. Despite being apocalyptic, these collected works show that it is possible for children who are 'different' to unite the world, rather than destroy it. Although parents cannot protect their children from all types of harm, these works reassure us that all experiences, whether good or bad, are valuable in making us the best of humanity.

Key Words: Apocalypse, film, metamorphosis, abjection, hybridity, post-human, American, multicultural, xenophobia, racism.

1. The Apocalypse and the Stolen Child

One of the best things about the apocalyptic genre of American film and television is its ability to absorb common fears, several at a time, into its depictions. Each year and each decade, the ways that our modern storytellers decide to 'end it all' represents that time period and the culture of that moment, so the apocalypse changes as we change. These works are cathartic, playing out on the big screen those things we fear at home and as a nation; they work out angst by demonstrating the worst possible case scenarios and demonstrating that humans are

too good, too strong, too family-oriented, and too patriotic to die out under even the absolute worst things Hollywood can dream up.

In order to survive in these apocalyptic fictions, characters must change and adapt. Although hybrid characters are sometimes adult figures, children are a more organic way to introduce these ideas because children represent change. Children are a new entity, created from what has come before, but unlike anything that has previously existed. Made out of two sets of genetic material, they are a natural duality. They can also be ‘hybrids,’¹ created in the liminal space of two or more cultures or combining two races, connecting the backgrounds and heritage of parental humans, beyond merely genes. In the best sense, children are a uniting force, beings that make one of two disparate worlds. At worst, they embody a new world, one that leaves the parents’ world behind in order to form its own. Science fiction takes this xenophobia, fear of difference, of greater abilities and stronger forces, and converts it into the fear of the hybrid, the half-human, or even the post-human. The newest of these portrayals, including films like *Underworld Awakening* (2012) or television’s *Falling Skies* (2011), move past the original horror to engender something original and positive by demonstrating the healing power of the hybrid child, the way in which the future is made from diverse influences, and illustrate that the multicultural and multiracial nature of humanity is a strength for American society rather than a weakness.

In apocalyptic film, children are integral to a world decimated by disaster, plague, war, or wrath of God for repopulation and the continuation of humankind, and sometimes even moral redemption or salvation. Many apocalyptic films focus on the human ‘saviour’ child, including *Children of Men* (2006), *Legion* (2009), and even the *Terminator* franchise (1984-2009) in its elevation of John Connor. These renditions are more traditional. The children function simply as symbols of hope, a promise that the film believes in a future for humankind that resembles the pre-apocalyptic world. The children are wholly human children who will become human adults.

Another example of this is the television series *Jeremiah* (2002-2004), which explores the idea of what happens when all the adults in the world die and only the children remain (in this case through a disease that kills all humans over the age of puberty). The show’s answer is not much. As long as there are children, then the world continues on, the same world with the same societies, practices and proclivities, perhaps only without electricity or modern day conveniences. These works find comfort in similarity and repeating cycles of humanity.

Unlike the aforementioned examples, the ‘stolen child’ ends up changing his or her own home environment substantially. Forces that initially steal children are generally governmental or alien. In almost all versions of this, when the children are returned or stolen back, the horror comes from this ‘almost human but not’ creation that they have become. Immediately, these children hybrids are discussed

as a destructive force or ‘weapons’ *against* humankind, and panic ensues. The general community does not accept the child. They make us uneasy.

There are two standard turning points in these works. The first takes place when a mother or mother figure defends the child, despite its half-alien, vampire, robot, or other genetic material or infected body. ‘Mothers’ – even if they are monstrous themselves – are necessary for their success.² When there is no mother figure to accept them, like in the television series *Threshold* (2005), the children use their power destructively rather than positively.

The second turning point occurs when the general population faces a crisis that needs the hybrid to survive. The children are still weapons, but now they are weapons set *for* humanity rather than against it. They fight humanity’s foes and win only because of their ‘special nature.’ This is when the terror turns to love or gratitude, and we are left with relief from our original horror. The child allows us to have a future and indicates biological or technological progress. We will live on, the same and changed, just as a new generation changes from the old, but becomes stronger because of the advancements now available.

These children often represent a blending, challenging the patriarchal and Caucasian power structures by indicating the strength of unifying and overcoming set boundaries designed to separate people into groups. Neither one nor the other, the liminal child can go where others cannot, can fight in original ways, and has powers and advantages that go beyond the limits of the normal child.

2. The Changeling Myth

Although all are stolen and hybrid, there are two types of stock child characters, which I will refer to as ‘changelings’ and ‘saved saviours.’ The first kind, the ‘changeling,’ I have named due to its connection with the old European myth. One retelling of this myth states:

The belief in changelings is not now generally prevalent; but in olden times a mother used to place a pair of iron tongs over the cradle before leaving the child alone, in order that the fairies should not change the child for a weakly one of their own.³

Other tales have the children being stolen by trolls or fairies and some even have the children coming back with special abilities, often demonic, or even with supernatural powers, which they generally try to hide from their ‘new’ parents. A parent knows that his or her child is *not* the child that he or she is supposed to have, and this is how they find out that it is a changeling; it seems the same, but it is almost imperceptibly different. C. F. Goodey and Tim Stainton’s psychology-based article finds that the connection between the ‘changeling myth’ and the disabled child is a relatively new phenomenon.⁴ The apocalyptic works that use the changeling depictions play on this fear of parents to have children who are not

‘normal’ or that do not live up to their original expectations. Yet, once they work through the horror of the ‘different child,’ these works inevitably demonstrate that no matter what the child truly is, he or she is special and necessary to society. New films recreate the psychological aspects of the changeling myth’s disappearance and reappearance of the child, the parents’ realisation that the child is not the same as the one they wanted or expected to have. The major difference between the apocalyptic changeling and the original stories is that the mother accepts the child as her own and that the child is only half different, not wholly replaced. Generally, these children are given back easily by the government or aliens because they are supposed to affect or even infect their home environment, but the children end up helping the humans rather than their captors.

An example of this is the alien-centred *Falling Skies* (2011), which features creatures who kidnap human children. The powerful, opening sequences of the pilot episode show children’s crayon drawings and provide child voice-overs of what has happened to earth. We begin the adventure through the children’s eyes, and we find out that although the aliens will certainly kill the adults, it is the children who are in the most danger.

The aliens ‘harness’ them with a biological control agent that not only drugs the children, but also creates a mental connection with them. Harnessed children have the ability to speak for the aliens, who seem to communicate through radio waves or telepathically, or both. The harnesses correct illness and defects within the children, making them stronger and faster, or in other words, better soldiers. Through Anne Glass (Moon Bloodgood), the medical doctor, we learn that the ‘skitters’ were likely something else that turned into the lesser aliens. This leads the series to one of its primary mysteries; will the harnessed children become aliens? By the end of the third season, we do not know.

The protagonist, Tom (Noah Wyle), a history professor turned soldier due to the alien apocalypse, has three sons. Ben (Connor Jessup), Tom’s middle son, and his friend, Rick (Daniyah Ysrayl), both reside with the aliens when the series begins. When returned from the aliens, Rick has been cured of a childhood chronic illness, and Ben has speed, stamina, agility, and strength that he never had before. Tom’s older and younger sons are not hybrids and therefore they do not have the same advantages that Ben does. The biggest one Ben has during the first season is the ability to help Scott (Bruce Gray) with a radio wave based weapon against the skitters. Ben can hear what frequencies hurt them because it hurts him as well. Without the hybrid child, the 2nd Massachusetts, as the resistance calls itself, would have been wiped out in that particularly brutal attack in the first season finale. When his father objects to his placing himself in danger to save them all, Ben tells him, ‘Dad, I know what they’re saying about me and Rick, that we’re infected by these harnesses. But if I can use what the “Skitters” did to me to get back at them, you have to let me.’⁵ He takes the negative and makes it a positive.

At the beginning of the second season, Ben is a skitter killing machine. His abilities have expanded to being able to sense the aliens, which is helpful on the battlefield. His skin is continuing to change into the hard skin that the aliens demonstrate, so we assume it is getting more serious or that he is transforming before our eyes. In the first few minutes of 'Worlds Apart,' we see him jump out of a second storey window in order to kill an alien with a knife, an inhuman feat. By the end of the second season, Ben is working with the rebel skitters to fight against their alien oppressors; he seems to be the only chance the humans have of defeating their colonisers. By the third season, Ben has the choice of whether to become wholly human through new technology or to stay as a hybrid; he chooses to stay hybrid because that is the only way that he is 'necessary.' In the last few episodes, the audience finds out that Alexis, Ben's half-sister, is also half-alien.⁶ Other notable changeling characters include Maia in *The 4400* (2004-2007) and even Olivia in *Fringe* (2008-2013). These changelings are not the children their parents expected, but they are what the human race needs.

3. Saved Saviours

The last type is the 'saved saviours.' They must be stolen back or rescued, often by a mother figure, because they are not returned willingly. There are plenty of examples of this type of hybrid child, and they are more common than the changelings, but the 'saved' saviours are still considered dangerous until they prove themselves indispensable.

Hybrid children are not always half-human. In the recent release, *Underworld: Awakening* (2012), Selene (Kate Beckinsale) and Michael (Scott Speedman) have escaped the Vampire and Lycan (werewolf) leaders, mostly by killing them all, and have plans to escape their newest threat: humans bent on eradicating all non-humans 'infected' by either Vampire or Lycan 'disease.' Selene is somewhat of a hybrid because of her 'gift' from the original creator of all Vampires and Lycans, the father of the Corvin family. This gift allows her to be able to walk in sunlight. Michael is a complete hybrid, having been bitten first by a werewolf and then by Selene to save his life in the original *Underworld* (2003).

However, shortly after the beginning of the film, Selene is frozen in a government facility. After her escape, she finds Eve (India Eisley), who was supposedly made from Selene, but the latter has no recollection of pregnancy or childbirth. In the vampire world, 'families' are created by the vampires themselves, but here, there is a genetic connection between Selene and Eve. In fact, they share a telepathic link, each being able to see through the other's eyes. We know little about Eve's origins, although her name certainly invokes the Biblical Eve, who was the first female of her kind too. Selene must steal Eve from the facility in order to fix the ongoing anti-vampire apocalypse.

Being half-Vampire and half-Lycan makes Eve a possible peacemaker as the war between the two has been ongoing for centuries. Ironically, the war began

when a Vampire, Sonja (Rhona Mitra), and Lycan, Lucian (Michael Sheen), attempted to have a hybrid child by sexual reproductive means because they loved one another. Sonja, pregnant with the hybrid baby, was executed by her father, Viktor (Bill Nighy), sparking the war between the two.⁷ As a side note, sexually reproduced hybrid characters generally are not as effective as those who are human and then turned into hybrids.

Eve fulfils that destiny of the hybrid child through the technological rather than sexual means. She could unite the two. The pattern here is similar to the other children created or enhanced through 'unnatural means' as they are dangerous and feared only until another worse creature threatens humankind and then she is their hope of survival, and in this case, hope of survival for all three species: human, Vampire and Lycan. Selene, the mother figure, must save Eve, so she can save the world.

Milla Jovovitch has a similar role as 'mother figure' in *Ultraviolet* (2006). Violet, a 'hemophage' (human infected with vampire disease) must save a clone named 6, who turns out to be a human/hemophage hybrid, so that he, 6, can save the world. In the last moments of the film, 6 tells Violet that he has the 'cure' for her that will allow her to continue past the expiration date for all hemophages, and as a weapons lab blows up behind them all, she vows to revenge all who 'spread oppression and injustice and hatred.'⁸ She saves him, so he can save her, and both can save the world.

Jovovitch's role as Alice in *Resident Evil 2: Apocalypse* (2004) reprises this same saving of saviour child. Alice, the genetically-enhanced main character, is tasked to save Angela (Sophie Vavasseur), the daughter of the man who developed the T-virus. What is the difference between Angela and Alice and the mob of brain and body eating zombies attacking Raccoon City? They have bonded with the virus and kept it in check; Alice does this with some kind of natural immunity, and Angela has been dosed constantly with the anti-virus. In order to survive, Alice must save the hybrid child and return her to her father despite the enormous amount of people and animal zombies, strangely evolved creatures and genetic mutations that get in her way. Later in *Resident Evil 4: Retribution* (2012), Alice becomes the mother of a cloned deaf child named Becky (Aryana Engineer), saving another child who was genetically engineered. Once saved, these children go on to save others all through their special abilities. Other notable saved saviour hybrids include Hera in the new *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009) and John in *I am Number Four* (2011).

There are plenty of other examples of these enhanced and hybrid children cropping up in apocalyptic film. Why children? Children are already uncanny. They are human and yet so very different from adults. We see them as ourselves; viewing the story through their perspective, we have automatic empathy. Yet, when they are revealed to be half 'other' we see them as abject figures. We are

afraid of their difference, but once the mother figure embraces the child figuratively, then society does, and that difference becomes a specialness.

As a whole, these apocalyptic films collectively say that life is precious, never to be wasted, and that we should never exclude people from society no matter how different they are. Being original or unique and having unusual talents is an asset, not a detriment. 'Difference' is a sign of moving forward, even if the child does not turn out as society or parents originally planned. Technology and biology scare us, but it also brings us the advances that we need. Ultimately, it is up to the children to define the society of the future. Despite being apocalyptic, all the examples here are ultimately positive in nature; they all indicate that it is possible for children to bring the world together, being harbingers of peace that remove the current structures to make way for the new, to create and unify, not to destroy.

Notes

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

² Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

³ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (N.p.: Evinity Pub. Inc., 2009).

⁴ C. F. Goodey and Tim Stainton, 'Intellectual Disability and the Myth of the Changeling Myth', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 37, No. 3 (2001): 223-224.

⁵ Robert Rodat, 'Eight Hours', *Falling Skies*, season 1, episode 10, dir. Greg Beeman, aired August 7 2011 (Redwood City, CA: Dreamworks Television, 2011), DVD.

⁶ Not enough of that storyline has been revealed to know whether it will play out similarly to Ben's storyline.

⁷ Danny McBride, Dirk Blackman and Howard McCain, *Underworld 3: Rise of the Lycans*, dir. Patrick Tatopoulos (Beverly Hills, CA: Lakeshore Entertainment, 2009), DVD.

⁸ Ibid.

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***Apocalypse Now* and the *Bhagavata Purana*: The End of the World as We Hardly Know It**

Igor Grbić

Abstract

Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* deserves to be seen as so much more than a film on the Vietnam War. The title itself suggests the apocalypse happened in the here and now of the film's plot, so we have ever since been living in a post-apocalyptic world. But the title is also open to an inner interpretation, applicable both to the film's characters, the production team, and the viewers. For what if the apocalypse has been happening all along? An all-encompassing perspective on apocalypse is found in the *Puranas*, epic compendia of ancient India. It is the aim of the chapter to first examine the implications of the film inscribed in its title, and then to deepen them even further, by relating them to the sophisticated, multilayered purports of apocalypse as presented by the *Puranas*.

Key Words: Apocalypse, *Apocalypse Now*, Vietnam, war, myth, *Puranas*, pralaya.

1. The Where and When of *Apocalypse Now*

What if the apocalypse, the ultimate event generations on generations have been preparing for, has actually already happened? What if we have misunderstood its meaning and misconceived its looks? If what happened is basically the same as suggested by someone's very insightful reading of Beckett's most famous play: Godot did come, but Vladimir and Estragon failed to recognise him.

This is at least what seems to be implied by *Apocalypse Now*, the title of Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film. This outwardly loose adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* sucks out the very essence of Conrad's novel and injects it into the setting of the Vietnam War. These, then, are the supposed time and place of the apocalypse.

The present interpretation will first concentrate on the film seen precisely as a coherent unfolding of its title. It is founded on *Apocalypse Now Redux*, the 2001 version, meant by Coppola to supplant the former one. By tracing its plot, motifs and symbols, I will try to show to what extent taking *Apocalypse Now* merely at its face value turns into just another war film something that, essentially, transcends not only the very genre, but also its particular time and space, outgrowing even the boundaries of cinematography as artefact, something *unlike* the 'real' world. The apocalypse present in the film's title can then be read less as a one-time, historical, collective event, than as a permanently present, spiritual, individual experience. Such a reading is particularly well supported by the ancient Indian *Puranas*, texts

offering an elaborate and comprehensive explication of the far-reaching meanings embedded in the naively simplified term *apocalypse*.

The film starts on a recognisably apocalyptic note: we see a forest on fire, the primary means of the world's dissolution. The forest, on the other hand, is a staple symbol of the primeval world, or, at the interior level, of the unconscious, one getting lost in it both in a physical and a spiritual way (the most famous Western example of the latter is, of course, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, beginning, 'In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost.').¹ Against the sound and fury of 'The End' by The Doors we are witnessing a human spiralling back into the primordial mass. An extension of a merely military reading is early corroborated by the appearance of a ceiling fan in a civil hotel, whose revolutions and sound overlap with those of the helicopter blades from the preceding sequence. Parallel to the blades falling is the fan that seems to be losing momentum. Finally, there is the head of Captain Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen), but turned upside down, unlike the fan in the right half, another early indication that the apocalypse is a fact concerning first and foremost man personally. The very human, even private, dimension of the apocalypse is further adumbrated by Willard's dazed monologue, 'I wanted a mission, and for my sins they gave me one.' The oncoming journey is thus to be seen as punishment, expiation, a Dante-like journey to hell. This is the apocalypse as seen from outside. At an inner level, the apocalyptic forces precipitate the characters into a kind of madness.

The patrol boat journey up the Nung River has nothing to do with the picaresque enterprises we typically meet in war films. Once Willard becomes engrossed in Kurtz's dossier it becomes increasingly clear that the 'mission' from his monologue is to be understood in a spiritual, rather than a military way. The journey turns out to be a rite of passage into the liminal spaces of human existence, subsumable under the mythological hero's journey, as elaborated particularly by Joseph Campbell, or, in psychological terms, under the path of individuation, as presented by Carl Gustav Jung. The hero's journey begins with his separation from his present world, initiation into the mysteries of another, and return to a world deepened by the acquired experience. In Jung's perspective, the path of (or to) individuation implies gradual assimilation of numinous archetypes into one's conscience, all the way to the self, one's comprehensive identity. Such a journey is triggered by a call, in Campbell's terms, while Jung speaks of an inner crisis forcing one to reach beyond one's ordinary identity.² In Coppola's film – befitting the ironic mode of our present age as described by Northrop Frye³ – the critical call has been parodied into a military order, coming completely from outside the seeker.

A journey leading to a contact with the other side requires an appropriate state of mind. Whoever does confront it has to be aware of the fact that it largely depends on him whether the experience will turn out to be a great blessing

(assimilating contents that will lead closer to the final integration of the self) or a great curse (being crushed by the numinosity of the encounter). The confrontation requires a feeling of reverence and constant wakefulness.

All of which is missing when the crew leaves upstream, to the source! They are excited young men naïvely expecting unadulterated adventure. It is only Captain Willard who is aware of their final target, and he is increasingly obsessed with Kurtz's personality as he peruses the dossier.

One of the motives reverberating with the religious dimension of the heroic journey is the cow (or buffalo). The one ritually killed toward the end of the film reminds us of the one hanging from a flying helicopter at the beginning. The image is closely followed by a military chaplain saying the Lord's Prayer. Soon afterwards Willard's boat is dropped onto the river by a helicopter, and the image of the hanging boat strongly resembles the previous image of the hanging cow: at the time of the apocalypse not only is religious upholding supplanted by sacrilegious destruction, but the scene parallelism also stresses the spiritual character of the forthcoming journey.

At the next post Willard collects the mail and hears from the soldier handing it they are now 'in the arsehole of the world.' We are once again reminded of Dante's *Comedy* and Satan's anus, at the bottom of hell. The journey is a progression down its circles. Even subtler than the visuals is its internal aspect: the madness that keeps flooding the film as we watch. At the beginning of the mission we meet Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore (Robert Duvall), who in no way responds to the war around him as a situation *out* of the ordinary. But as much as he might be deranged, it is part of the film's amplification poetics that he represents only the tip of madness. The spectator is carefully being led to the moment of real nightmare: the massacre of all Vietnamese civilians on the sampan boat they stop for a routine check. It is the first unmotivated killing, completely unnecessary and the more terrifying for the fact that it has been performed by a teenager, the already highly nervous Clean, and finished by a Willard preventing first aid to the wounded woman and finishing her off instead, not to divert them from their target. Nobody feels the need to reproach anybody for what happened, nobody is troubled by a notion of responsibility. The drastic decline of conscience reflects in fact an apocalyptic decline of consciousness (notice the close etymologies). Where the crew – or what is left of it – finally arrives, the apocalypse is definitely going on already. The tribal people that come to meet it are white with ash. They are already dead. A bleak reversal of the landing of a Western ship in sun-drenched, paradisiac Tahiti.⁴

Structurally, the whole film is a pretext for standing face to face with Kurtz, the mad warrior poet and self-made high priest caricature. His pontifical role in that heart of darkness is stressed by his bald, monk-like head, that hardly ever emerges into the light. He actually comes very close to being the god himself of that world, its tremendous, nihilistic incarnation. The world around him is then simply his

emanation. To confront him is Willard. He is the mock hero who has to slay the dragon in order to finish his own journey and start back home. We are unambiguously given to understand that it is only *his* quest, indeed: Lance, the only survivor besides Willard himself, ends up evidently swallowed by the corroding mental process begun on the boat. Kurtz is the lord of the outer apocalypse, and the victim of the inner. Here we should be reminded that apocalypse literally means revelation. It is the unveiling of another, or even *the* other world. The nature of its content and the force of its impact are something that has to be uncovered only very slowly, under the guidance of somebody waiting on the other side, preferably. The alternative is almost certainly madness, being overwhelmed by unconscious materials let loose, as in Kurtz's case. His inner apocalypse is the counterpart of the one going on outside. The image combining the two aspects are the dead bodies scattered all over the compound, the leftovers of Kurtz's mania. And this is yet another part of the film's amplification, from Kilgore's cowboy-like, essentially playful violence, through the boat massacre, to the tribals adoring the one who is destroying them.

On Kurtz's desk we see a copy of *The Golden Bough*, J. G. Frazer's seminal work. The old king has exhausted his beneficial *mana* and it is now the hero's task to end his mutated, destructive rule so as to let the flow of life pervade the country once again. The obvious willingness with which Kurtz allows Willard to kill him should come as no surprise once we become aware of this sacrificial pattern. The religious character of the regicide is stressed by the overlapping ritual killing of a water buffalo at the hands of the natives. Willard is shown emerging from water, a symbol of the unconscious and regeneration, face painted in war colours. The mirror of the water recalls the hotel mirror from the beginning of the film which Willard smashes with his bare fist, causing it to bleed, a prefiguration of the present sacrificial blood. Moreover, we see many natives with faces equally painted or masked. One's own personality is being relinquished, drowned in the waters that consume every singularity.⁵

So far everything seems to be well and fine. But Willard does not inherit Kurtz. The waste land remains waste. Actually, at the end of the film Willard does not really look as the traditional hero at all. Coming out of Kurtz's quarters – that resemble a temple, another symbol of spiritual transformation – Willard is welcomed by the tribals as their new god. He slowly moves his head to one side, so that half of his face remains sunk in shadow, irresistibly evoking the lighting of Kurtz's head. In his hand he is clutching Kurtz's manuscript on total extermination. A shift towards an inner identification with him is thus beyond doubt. The rain that sees Willard and Lance out of the compound is the same rain that has been falling throughout the film, and is not life-giving. Although the mythic pattern has been faithfully repeated, in the apocalypse the mythic regeneration does not work any more. God is present only as a parody, as Almighty, code name of the headquarters calling Willard via radio waves. The quest is aborted. The last we see of Willard is

his face disappearing behind a traditional stone sculpture. Organic, individualised, conscious life dissolves into the unconscious, pre-individual, anorganic.

To accuse *Apocalypse Now* of excessiveness is to ignore its pivotal tone: this is a film about the apocalypse, and an apocalypse *is* an excessive event. It is also misleading to consider it a film on the Vietnam War. Coppola himself declared his film was actually Vietnam itself, and not at all a movie.⁶ And that seems more to the point. *Apocalypse Now* is a vision. It surely got rid of its author and his intentions, which is why Coppola found it so difficult to end it. Yet more significant is the following statement of Coppola's, '[I]t struck me like a diamond bullet in my head that I wasn't making the film, the jungle was.'⁷ We have already been introduced to the forest as a symbol of the deepest unconscious. Besides, the very shooting of the film was fraught with difficulties and profoundly affected the persons involved, both physically and mentally. As if it had also been the participants' journey! Martin Sheen even went as far as declaring he had *chosen* to have his heart attack, he had needed it, in order to die as his old self.⁸ It was apocalypse for both Willard and Sheen.

So what if the apocalypse has already happened? If *Apocalypse Now* is a film on the Vietnam War, then this is the conclusion that follows. My argumentation, however, has been taking Vietnam and its war rather as an accidental backdrop for something irreducible to a single place and a single event. I have also tried to show that the film's title is open to both an outward and inward interpretation and applicable both to the film, with its characters, and to the production set, with its team. But what if the *apocalypse* and the *now* are not to be taken only from the film's or the filmmakers' perspectives, but also from the viewer's? And what if the apocalypse *has* already happened, but we did not notice when it was happening?

2. The One and Many Apocalypses of India

Lord Shiva dances the worlds into dissolution, *pralaya*, for new universes to emerge. The most elaborate accounts of *pralaya* are to be found in the *Puranas*, later Hindu texts, of which the best-suited to my present purpose is the *Bhagavata Purana*.⁹ Their most prominent contribution to the concept of *pralaya* is the awareness that we should rather speak of different ends of the world.

The first kind is *naimittika pralaya*, the occasional or incidental apocalypse. At the end of every *kalpa* – one day of Brahma, comprising 4,320,000,000 solar years – the world dissolves into the *naimittika pralaya*, the night of Brahma, which is going to last as long as his day.¹⁰ It is a cyclic alternation between the Creator's staying awake and sleep. The substance of the world, however, remains intact. Only its form is dissolved. One *kalpa* consists of of four *yugas*, ages of the world, each of which is worse than the preceding one(s). The last is *kali*, the black age. Needless to say, it is the one we are living in (if the apocalypse has indeed not already come!), characterised by overall degeneration, in which we recognize the

situation present in *Apocalypse Now*: in *kali yuga* people ‘will ever remain perturbed in mind [...] will kill even their own people.’¹¹

The second kind of apocalypse is *praktika pralaya*, natural, primordial. When Brahma’s life, lasting one hundred Brahma’s years, has come to its end – for the Creator is just God’s demiurge, himself expendable – it is time for God (Vishnu) to take a nap. This *praktika pralaya* will last 311,040,000,000,000 solar years, just as long as Brahma’s life. It is an ultimate recalling of all, even the subtlest aggregates of creation. A suspension of existence. In macrocosmic terms, it is the furthest an apocalypse can go, with huge quantities of fire and water, which also permeate the film.

But there is also a third apocalypse, *nitya*, meaning constant, eternal. Indeed, what if the apocalypse has already happened, and we did not even notice it? Even more, what if it is happening all the time, and we keep passing it by?! Now, this is an apocalypse that begins to involve even us, the viewers of *Apocalypse Now*. Says the wise Shuka:

Some men, knowing [...] declare the creation and dissolution of all created beings from Brahma downward as going on all the time [...] The (successive) stages [...] are certainly not perceived [...].¹²

Naimittika and *praktika pralayas* are plain enough for everybody to see. *Nitya pralaya* requires rather to be taught. One has to be made aware of it, to awaken to it. Actually, it, too, is quite obvious, but, drenched in time, it dulls our perception into inertia that takes it for granted. The perennial decomposing and recomposing of the world around and inside us is a lasting apocalypse that we euphemistically call existence. We are constantly reincarnating. And if every moment is essentially the same rebirth and re-death endlessly repeating, it becomes very difficult to privilege one moment over another.

So we arrive at the fourth kind of apocalypse, known as *atyantika*, beyond end. It is the ultimate spiritual emancipation, a fact that in India is generally accepted. The genius of the *Puranas* is rather in their having recognised that it is to be counted among the *pralayas*. It is the final, most exquisite apocalypse. Instead of the world disappearing and ending man, here man disappears and ends the world. The world has finally been seen through as only an imagined veil covering the true essence (here the true etymology of *apocalypse*!).

With the last two kinds of *pralaya*, *Apocalypse Now* becomes a title that can very well involve the viewer, too. Any *now* of his life is the stage of an apocalypse, and at any *now* can he cut loose of the lasting time, be reduced to eternity, which is the non-lasting now. Naturally, these additional meanings of apocalypse are open to Benjamin Willard, too. *Atyantika pralaya* is an extremely personal affair, and Willard is, in fact, on the hero’s journey, the only one who knows the purpose of

the mission. It is he in whom the experience of the outward apocalypse begins corroding the system for a potential collapse towards the inner apocalypse. The *will* carved into his surname might eventually come to epitomize a triumph of his daylight will power, or its capitulation to the true source of all our wills. True, Willard in no way seems to be a saint on the threshold of enlightenment, but I still take whatever has here been said to be true on principle. On principle, the water Willard emerged from, minutes before killing Kurtz, is both the deluge water of *prakrti pralaya* and the baptismal water of *atyantika pralaya*. But then, apocalypse is ultimately about us, the viewers, not about the characters. And our present *kali yuga*, however bad it is, still offers grand opportunities. In such a degenerate state of mankind, claim the *Puranas*, God alleviates the criteria for the ultimate release. So, if according to the most accepted count the *kali yuga* is going to last for another 427,000 years, instead of fearing an apocalypse from outside we should perhaps consider timely dedicating ourselves to an apocalypse within. Here, and now.

Notes

¹ In various depth psychologies the forest has proved to be a symbol of the unconscious, time and again. See for instance C. G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), 134 and 188.

² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949). For Jung, see any of the classic introductions to his concepts, such as *Man and His Symbols* by himself and his collaborators, Jolande Jacobi's *Die Psychologie von C. G. Jung* (in English translation *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*), or *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* by Frieda Fordham.

³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), especially 33-67.

⁴ Tim Dirks, 'Apocalypse Now (1979)', accessed 10 October 2013, <http://www.filmisite.org/apoc.html>.

⁵ '[T]he mirror of the waters [...] does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it [...] [T]he mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face.' C. G. Jung, 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', *The Integration of the Personality*, trans. Stanley Dell (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1941), 69.

⁶ Francis Ford Coppola, 'My Film Is Not a Movie...', accessed 25 October 2013, <http://1001plus.blogspot.com/2012/12/joseph-conrad.html>.

⁷ Richard Roud, 'Apocalypse Now', accessed 10 October 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/oct/19/apocalypse-now-review>.

⁸ 'Martin Sheen (Apocalypse Now)', accessed 28 October 2013,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFiFQZeYeTU>.

⁹ *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, trans. C. L. Goswami, M. A., Shastri, Vol. 2., Book 12, Chapter 4 (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2008), 680-684.

¹⁰ Note that the duration corresponds to our scientists' rough estimation of the age of the Earth.

¹¹ *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, 679-680. Just as in the film: Kurtz is killing his own people, and Willard himself is sent to kill him, one of his own.

¹² *Ibid.*, 683.

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Crime and Punishment: Greed, Pride and Guilt in *Breaking Bad*

Pablo Echart and Alberto N. García

Abstract

Although *Breaking Bad* is one of the most critically acclaimed TV-series of the last decade, it has been the subject of little academic research. This chapter aims to explore the motivations fueling Walter White's behaviour, one of the most compelling characters in contemporary popular culture. The discovery of Walter White's cancer serves as a catalyst (a particularly appropriate chemical term) for him to unveil his true 'inner self.' The serious nature of his disease, the associated medical costs, and his feeling of failure as both a father/husband and in the professional sphere, are established as the driving force behind his infamous behavior from the very start of the series. However, beyond the strategies that underlie the initial sympathy that viewers usually tend to feel for this 'ordinary American guy,' *Breaking Bad* divulges other keys that allow us to understand the transformation from 'Mr Chips into Scarface,' following the premise described by *Breaking Bad*'s creator, Vince Gilligan. As we will explore, the progressive moral and criminal decline of Walter White is spurred on by the contradictory tension between two radical emotions that become 'rationalised' in order to justify his actions, which become increasingly less defensible: an increasing pride, and the guilt that fades as the narrative unfolds. In summary, we will analyse the moral and narrative mechanisms that hasten Walter White's self-destruction once he became aware that he was facing the end of his own life.

Key Words: *Breaking Bad*, Walter White, TV-series, character arc, moral disease, emotions.

1. Introduction¹

When consciously coming face to face with what is to be the end of one's life, it can be said that there is a universal need – reinforced by Judeo-Christian tradition – to repent and plea for forgiveness for the errors one has committed, and for the harm caused to others.² Films and Literature are full of characters who, like Tolstoi's Ivan Ilitch,³ feel the urgent need to amend for the errors of a lifetime when confronted by their death.

This is also the starting point of *Breaking Bad*: Walter White receives the news that he is suffering from terminal cancer and as is often the case, the proximity of death forces this character to take stock of his life and instills in him the need to follow a different path: he begins synthesising and distributing methamphetamine. But the path that Walter chooses is somewhat peculiar in that it involves a radical

inversion of the aforementioned values: pride and a suppression of the feeling of guilt replace the need to repent and that of forgiveness.

Under this premise, which will be the object of our analysis, *Breaking Bad* sets out on a descent along the road to hell. A journey full of errors, absurdity and failure, which nevertheless does not appear to be able to compete with the subjective pleasure that Walter takes from the sensation of power and of the liberation from any moral restrictions.

2. Greed: Moral Choices in a Land of Plenty

To some extent, the most recently acclaimed American fictional series offers a critical reflection on the identity of The United States of America. If *Deadwood*, for example, offers a revisionist view of the gestation of a nation in the format of a Western,⁴ *The Wire* closed the circle by condemning the social and political decomposition that appears to be beyond redemption.⁵ In this climate of deconstruction series like *Breaking Bad* or *Mad Men* develop the tale of the rise and fall of individuals who fall victim to their own decisions, but whose moral decline is rooted in the chimera of culturally accepted personal achievement.

As analysed by Lisan Van Dorp, series like *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men* or *Boardwalk Empire* coincide in that they revolve around a main character who embodies the perversions drawn from the emphasis on the ideal of success that is rooted in the myth of the 'American Dream.'⁶ For her, Walter White – like Don Draper or 'Nucky' Thompson – respects the narrative of the rise in society of the *self-made man* in its cynical or disillusioned state, as they break with the moral restraints associated with such an archetype. Thus, we find ourselves confronted with characters who are totally dedicated to their work, who sacrifice themselves in the search for professional excellence and who demonstrate an overwhelming will to satisfy the material needs of their families. Yet, at the same time they are prepared to use illegal and immoral means to reach their objectives, that embody the absolute ideal of success, and as such, the fulfillment of a worthwhile life.

Walter White to some extent represents the living image of failure.⁷ Frustration and misfortune appear to have accompanied him for decades: his son was born with cerebral palsy; he was left out of the undeniable professional success of his two initial partners; he has two jobs both well below his capacities; and moreover, he cannot even ensure the financial stability of his family now that lung cancer is threatening to take his life away from him.

This illness acts as a catalyst ('I am awake!' he yells in the pilot episode) and precipitates a brutal transformation that, as Gilligan states, constitutes the core of the series.⁸ Walter sets out to become master of his destiny, beginning with the need to prosper, which in keeping with the myth, is within the reach of each and every one of us. As such, Walter's greed acts as a pretext – basing its moral justification, as we shall see, in his pathological pride and a sense of guilt that is ever more tenuous – on which a deeper transformation of his character occurs.⁹

Cooking methamphetamine allows him in the first instance to earn ‘easy money’¹⁰ but also, it allows him to demonstrate his professional capacity – finally he can show that he is the best at something – and this becomes a metaphor of his personal evolution: ‘Chemistry is the study of matter, but I prefer to see as the study of change.’¹¹

Beyond this need, the tortuous but lucrative drug trade becomes addictive to Walter, even when his cancer remits significantly and, as such, his life is no longer in immediate danger. Walter always finds a reason to continue despite the enormous toll that he must pay: in the eyes of the spectator, a dehumanisation derived from his progressive loss of moral scruples; in his own eyes, the constant distancing of that he most loves – or at least this is what he says – and that he tries to protect with a tight knit and unsustainable web of lies, his family. Here the true irony of the series crystallises: it is precisely the initial zeal of Walter to amass a fortune for the good of his family that unleashes the domestic hell and the eventual rupture of the family unit.¹² Moreover, Walter not only reaches the point that Skyler detests him (to the point of wishing him dead) but he also gets her caught up in and perverted by his evil trajectory.¹³

The destructive spiral in which Walter White has entered can only be understood in the light of the dark gratification that White/Heisenberg receives in exchange. A compensation related to the emotional restitution of his long hurt pride.

3. Pride and the Family Alibi

Although the drive to earn money that will serve for the good of the family is a genuine objective in the initial episodes, it is soon converted into a mere excuse. The leaning towards the world of drugs and the reprehensible actions that this entails are justified by Walter with this mantra: the need to provide for the family. Walter, already a master of self-deception, is occasionally supported by Skyler¹⁴ and by the guiding influence of Gus Fring, who helps to clarify any doubt or remorse:

Walter White: I have made a series of very bad decisions and I cannot make another one.

Gus Fring: Why did you make these decisions?

Walter White: For the good of my family.

Gus Fring: Then they weren’t bad decisions. What does a man do, Walter? A man provides for his family.¹⁵

In reality, the exaggerated accumulation of money is consistent with Walter's pride, which led him to reject the charity and to seek recognition. The first season emphasises the former. In addition to rejecting the economic aid offered by his in-laws to pay for his treatment,¹⁶ his refusal to accept the succulent offer of employment that is made by his ex-partner, which would have enabled him to avoid any illegal activity forever, is fundamental: it is here that it becomes clear that his pride is more important than his love for his family. Walter appears to follow the famous quote of George Sand to the letter: 'Charity degrades those who receive it and hardens those who dispense it.'

Likewise, Walter experiences the pleasure of an ever-increasing narcissism. His virtuosity in chemistry and his intelligence earn him the reverential respect of – on occasion accompanied by fear – his rivals. From being a figure lambasted by the rest and by destiny, Walter begins to feel the pleasurable sensation of taking hold of the reins of his life, of 'being in control,' as he states in front of another patient that was weakened by cancer.¹⁷ Although money no longer becomes a need, Walter remains addicted to the business in which he can demonstrate to the rest of the world that his *artistry* is unsurpassable. As Tangney and Fischer explain,

emotions such as shame, guilt, pride and embarrassment are founded on social relationships, in which people not only interact but evaluate and judge themselves and each other. Self-conscious emotions [such as pride] are built on reciprocal evaluation and judgment.¹⁸

As such, the ever more pathological personality of Walter demands public recognition, he needs others to be aware of his talent. This is what finally allowed him to *be someone*.¹⁹ It is sufficient to compare the scene in the pilot where he hides from his students in the car wash with the excessive reassertion when confronted with some thugs at the end of the fifth season: 'Now: say my name! ['Heisenberg', says the man] You're goddam right!!'²⁰ This sentence shows how Walter has acquired an exaggerate pride – i.e., hubris. As Lewis defines it, hubris is a 'transient but addictive emotion' where people 'seek out and invent situations likely to repeat this emotional state.'²¹

This same excessive pride not only marks Walter's internal conflict but also, it is determinant as to how his relationships with the characters that surround him evolve. His relationship with Jesse wavers during the fourth season when Walter sees his leadership threatened and he begins to feel *expendable*. It is the same pride that leads him to nearly give himself away in a police murder case (the assassination of Gale), as he can't tolerate that his genius and cooking craftsmanship is attributed to another chemist.²² Even Mike makes a reference to this Walter's pathological pride, situating it as the source of all his troubles:²³

We had a good thing, you stupid son of a bitch, we had Fring (...) You could have shut your mouth and cooked and made as much money as you would have ever needed. But no, you just had to blow it up! You and your pride and your ego, you just had to be the man! If you'd done your job, known your place, we'd all be fine right now.²⁴

However, where the complex drive of his pride is most evident is in his relationship with his family. During the first two series the relationship with Skyler is strongly based on the other face of this pride: shame. As catalogued by Tangney and Fischer, these are 'emotions of opposite polarity.' At the outset of the story, the Walter's moral compass indicates how reprehensible his actions are and consistent with the classical response to shame, he 'tries to hide or escape from the observation or judgment'²⁵ of others, in this case that of his wife and son. As it turns out, and as Gilligan admits, Walter is a genius when it comes to deceit: 'Walt's superpower is that of being the biggest liar in the world. There is no better liar in the world of *Breaking Bad* and the person that he is most capable of deceiving is in fact he himself.'²⁶

However, by the end of the second season two events occur that alter Walter's self-image: Skyler discovers his continued farces; and his cancer temporally remits. Both these facts – intertwined with the rest of the story, as is logical – provoke a new psychological twist in Walter, and as is a norm throughout the series, his pride imposes on the shame or guilt (as we will analyse in the following section). As is the emotional leitmotiv of *Breaking Bad*, Walter White rationalises his emotions adapting them to the new scenario, and always giving preference to his pride over his feelings of guilt. He again adopts what Williams and DeSteno call a 'hubristic pride': '[It] has no particular target and in essence is an unconditional positive view of one's self as a whole that may lead to negative social consequences.'²⁷ The zenith of this transformation (that in the fifth season will derive into domestic psychological terror) takes place in 'Cornered' when Skyler doubts the physical integrity of her husband, accusing him implicitly of being weak. An irate Walter responds:

You clearly don't know who you're talking to, so let me clue you in: I am not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger. A guy opens his door and gets shot, and you think that of me? No! I am the one who knocks!²⁸

In this sense, Kuo and Wu defined a suggestive analogy between this character and Satan in *Paradise Lost*,²⁹ and it is clear that Walter adheres to the phrase of Milton's Demon: 'Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.' But to reign in hell it is necessary to act with malice. Accordingly, the progressive dehumanisation

of the protagonist is driven by his exaggerated pride that, as the story unfolds, becomes released from all the moral constraints that are imposed by an emotion that is so human, the sense of guilt. Deprived of this sensation, Walter is converted into a remorseless man.

4. Guilt and the Birth of a Superman: From Mr. White to Heisenberg

As we have explained, *Breaking Bad* narrates the story of a monster that is fighting to cast off his human mask. This metamorphosis is progressive and in fact, Walter initially awakens certain compassion such that the spectator can empathise with him: during the first season, the sick Walter is the 'identifiable suburban dad under enormous pressure'.³⁰ The challenge of the series precisely lies in the extent to which the viewer's interest in the luck of a character that is ever more repulsive can be maintained, and with whom the bond of a shared moral code is progressively lost. As the monster begins to take over, Walter's pride begins to crush his moral conscience, his sense of guilt.

This is clearly evident through the brutal acts that he begins to commit. They are ever more outrageous and severe, and yet the chemistry teacher always finds a way to justify them. The first important violent act comes in the third episode of the series, with the death of Krazy-8. On this occasion, as occurs throughout the first two seasons, all these assassinations have an air of a mere instinct for survival: kill in self defence or be killed.

The big change comes later, not by chance, once his cancer remits and Walter demonstrates the strength of Heisenberg's personality with that 'Stay Out of my territory' that he bellows in the hardware store.³¹ Soon later, in 'Phoenix,' Jane dies.³² In this case there was no physical threat to his life (as occurred in the earlier deaths) but he still refuses to help her and he is fully aware that he has left her choking to die. What is interesting in this event is the contrast in the way it affects the protagonists: while Jesse's sense of guilt becomes ever more apparent,³³ Walter appears to be ever more immune to the moral consequences of his actions.

During part of the series, Walter White exhibits a conscience that admits the evil in his actions, and as a consequence, he on occasions expresses a strong sense of guilt. This explains his enraged response to such good news as the remission of his illness.³⁴ Walter response is to cause himself pain (furiously smashing his knuckles in the bath) and in that moment, we sense that he cannot support the guilt of all the pain that he caused. No longer can he argue that mitigating circumstances justify what he does is for a greater good given the imminence of his death. This is the feeling that becomes explicit in 'The Fly':

Skyler and Holly were in another room. I can hear them on the baby monitor. She was singing a lullaby. Oh, if I had just lived right up to that moment...and not one second more. That would have been perfect (...) I'm saying that I lived too long.³⁵

However, as we explain, his exaggerated pride further complicates the justification of his motivations. His rules change, readapting to the new situations of the plot with a single, constant emotional aspect: that his pride overrides his guilt.³⁶ This is the big difference with Pinkman. In fact, he feels what Lacroix labeled as ‘morbid guilt.’³⁷ Jesse perceives the stain of his actions and he becomes the moral voice of the pair from when he kills Gale.³⁸ From then, the sense of guilt makes him more human and enhances his empathy with the spectator, unlike Walter who is increasingly more distanced morally from the audience. In the third season, Mr White steps up a level by running over Gus Fring’s two henchmen and orchestrating the liquidation of Gale. In the fourth he puts in danger a child (poisoning Brock) and an elderly lady (the neighbor that he uses as to ensure the path is clear in ‘Face Off’),³⁹ and in the fifth, as well as terrifying Skyler, and running over and killing Mike, his reaction to the death of the child on the motorbike is very significant: projecting along with Jesse a compassion that proves to be false when just moments later we see him happily whistling.⁴⁰ Walter is now a merciless and guiltless man, a superman – *Übermensch* in Nietzschean terms⁴¹ – capable of constructing his very own value system. He adopts what Heller labels as a ‘narcissistic conscience,’ where acts are differed from consequences: ‘In the case of narcissistic conscience, ‘taking full responsibility’ means to reject consciously all responsibility with conscience’s usual cry: Here I stand and cannot do otherwise.’⁴²

5. Conclusion

‘Jesse, you asked me once, If I was in the meth business or the money business. Neither. I’m in the Empire Business.’⁴³ In order to finalise the descent into hell of Walter White, it seems that his moral decomposition cannot be reversed. Surrender no longer seems to be a valid option. Indeed, as spectators, we know that on the one hand, his cancer returns and Walter is on the run (thanks to the flashforward in ‘Live Free or Die’),⁴⁴ and on the other, that Hank has discovered the identity of the mysterious Heisenberg (the scene with which episode ‘Gliding Over All’ closes).⁴⁵

However, in accordance with the complex emotional web that we have studied in these pages, the megalomania expressed and confirmed to Jesse’s face demonstrates that Walter’s ambition and pride has no limits. Neither the family nor the pain caused, not even the millions of dollars that he has accumulated can detain him from forging onwards and upwards. In reality, only one issue remains to be clarified, to determine if Walter suffers an *anagnorisis* that brings him face-to-face with the unfathomable depths of his malice and of the damage that he has provoked, or whether by contrast, he will self-destruct and die writhing in the ecstasy of the most powerful drug: that of an arrogance that makes him believe that he is above any moral law.

Notes

¹ This paper was presented in July 2013. The last 8 episodes of *Breaking Bad* aired in the US during August and September and, therefore, this analysis has been done without taking into account the end of the TV-series.

² Charles Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Christopher R. Allers and Marieke Smit, *Forgiveness in Perspective* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

³ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2004).

⁴ Robert Westerfelahaus and Celeste Lacroix, 'Waiting for the Barbarians: HBO's *Deadwood* as a Post-9/11 Ritual of Disquiet', *Southern Communication Journal* 74 (2009): 18-39; Daniel Worden, 'Neo-liberalism and the Western: HBO's *Deadwood* as National Allegory', *Canadian Review of American Studies* 39 (2009): 221-246.

⁵ Marsha Kinder, 'Re-Wiring Baltimore: The Emotive Power of Systemic, Seriality, and the City', *Film Quarterly* 62 (2008-09): 50-57; Blake D. Ethridge, 'Baltimore on *The Wire*: The Tragic Moralism of David Simon', in *It's Not TV. Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, eds. Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louis Buckley (New York: Routledge, 2008), 152-164.

⁶ Lisa Van Dorp, 'The Dramatization and Criticism of Ideal of Success in American Society on American Television: A Case Study of the Representation of Success in *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* and *Boardwalk Empire*' (MA Thesis, Utrecht University, 2011), 70-72.

⁷ This idea is very clearly reinforced visually through the dull form of dressing or the fact that he drives an exceedingly unappealing car: a Pontiac Aztec, considered by *The Daily Telegraph* in 2008 as the top of the list of the 100 most ugly cars in history.

⁸ Emmanuel Burdeau, 'En las entrañas de *Breaking Bad*', *So Film* 01 (2013): 52.

⁹ Again reflected in his appearance: he adopts a more aggressive look (that includes sunglasses and a shaved head), he assumes the identity of Heisenberg (a tribute to the celebrated German Physicist who, among others activities, led the Nazi's attempts to build an atomic bomb); and finally, he changes his Pontiac for a much flashier and stunning sports car.

¹⁰ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Pilot', prod. Vince Gilligan (Los Angeles: Sony Pictures Television), aired on 20 January 2008.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ironically this effect is again evident in Walter's absence at such an important and symbolic moment as the birth of his daughter, which he misses as he has to make an important drug delivery that is crucial to be able to take a step upwards in the business. Another unexpected turn of events in this underworld will prevent

him later from attending Walter Junior's birthday and, as anticipated in the flashforward in 'Live Free or Die', he will also celebrate his 52nd birthday alone.

¹³ Walter is kicked out of his home and although he later manages to return, he watches as his children abandon the family home to move into that of their aunt and uncle. This movement of separation-reuniting-separation is also evident in his relationship with Skyler: she breaks up with him (and betrays him) when she discovers his dealings, and later they get back together to *launder* his money, efficiently removing any trace of its origins in the drug business, and finally, she again abandons him, both due to the danger and the threat of death that Walter's presence implies to them, as well as out of the fear and horror that she feels when she discovers the monster that her husband has become.

¹⁴ Skyler also justifies her foray into the criminal world by using the same justification as Walter: to defend the moral and physical integrity of the family. However, the sense of guilt experienced by one and the other are radically distinct.

¹⁵ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Mas', Season 3, Episode 5, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 18 April 2010.

¹⁶ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Cancer Man', Season 1, Episode 4, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 17 February 2008.

¹⁷ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Hermanos', Season 4, Episode 8, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 4 September 2011.

¹⁸ June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer, eds., *Self-Conscious Emotions. The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment and Pride* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 3-4.

¹⁹ Again, the imprudent change of car serves as a visual reference in this sense.

²⁰ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Say My Name', Season 5, Episode 7, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 26 August 2012.

²¹ Michael Lewis, 'Self Conscious Emotions: Embarrassment, Pride, Shame, and Guilt', in *Handbook of Emotions*, eds. Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 749.

²² Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Shotgun', Season 4, Episode 5, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 14 August 2011.

²³ An accusation that logically, further triggers Walter's pride and causes him to act irrationally and to kill Mike.

²⁴ Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Say My Name'.

²⁵ Tangney and Fischer, *Self-Conscious Emotions*, 10.

²⁶ Burdeau, 'En las Entrañas', 52.

²⁷ Lisa A. Williams and David DeSteno, 'Pride and Perseverance: The Motivational Role of Pride', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94, No. 6 (2008): 1008.

²⁸ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Cornered', Season 4, Episode 6, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 21 August 2011.

²⁹ Michelle Kuo and Albert Wu, "'In Hell, We Shall Be Free": On *Breaking Bad*", *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 13 July 2012, accessed 5 April 2013, <http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=761&fulltext=1>.

³⁰ Alan Sepinwall, *The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever* (New York: Touchstone, 2013), 356-357.

³¹ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Over', Season 2, Episode 10, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 10 May 2009.

³² Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Phoenix', Season 2, Episode 12, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 24 May 2009.

³³ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Problem Dog', Season 4, Episode 7, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 28 August 2011.

³⁴ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, '4 Days Out', Season 2, Episode 9, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 3 May 2009.

³⁵ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'The Fly', Season 3, Episode 10, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 23 May 2010.

³⁶ This moral decline is not linear, as the more humane Walter at times struggles to break through to the surface and overthrow his other ego. In fact, there is a painful moment of weakness when he breaks into tears before his son ('Salud'). This is the last time that Walter White considers any alternative to his criminal life. However, a new turn at the end of the following episode (regarding the money that Skyler gives to Beneke) forces him to again forge onwards and as is by that stage becoming the norm, his pride supersedes any other moral consideration.

³⁷ Jean Lacroix, *Philosophie de la Culpabilité* (Paris: PUF, 1977), 24.

³⁸ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Full Measure', Season 3, Episode 13, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 13 June 2010.

³⁹ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Face Off', Season 4, Episode 13, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 9 October 2011.

⁴⁰ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Buyout', Season 5, Episode 6, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 19 August 2012.

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xviii.

⁴² Agnes Heller, *The Power of Shame: A Rational Perspective* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 38.

⁴³ Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Buyout', Season 5, Episode 6.

⁴⁴ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, 'Live Free or Die', Season 5, Episode 1, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 15 July 2012.

⁴⁵ Vince Gilligan, *Breaking Bad*, ‘Gliding Over All’, Season 5, Episode 8, prod. Vince Gilligan, aired on 2 September 2012.

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Black Mirror: ‘The National Anthem’. An Artistic Creation for an Institutional Crisis

Edisa Mondelo González, Alfonso Cuadrado Alvarado and Rubén Sánchez Trigos

Abstract

In ‘The National Anthem,’ the first episode of *Black Mirror*, the relationship between citizens and politicians seems depicted as a masquerade with a single rule: the most humiliated reaches the highest level of celebrity, at the expense of losing privacy but keeping public appearance, like a *Big Brother* contestant. This breaking plot suggests a critical interpretation about the lack of trust in political institutions, which lose the popular battle against the most traditional institutions. According to the plot, the second ones are in fact traditional only due to their impact on media, thus the People’s Princess is so, not only for being a Duchess, but for being familiar on TV and in the press. On the other hand, the Prime Minister’s behaviour is totally conditioned by the directions of public opinion. The crisis of parliamentary monarchy is depicted through an apocalyptic landscape: the empty streets of London and all the population gathered in front of TV screens to behold live the most absolute abasement of the Prime Minister. Also, the screenplay of this first episode offers a final twist by converting this socio-political experience into a subversive work, even more lethal to the political institution precisely for being screened to millions of viewers... and for this fact: its collective consumption becomes an extreme artistic phenomenon, praised by the critics of the media involved in its broadcast.

Key Words: *Black Mirror*, crisis of democracy, reality show, apocalyptic landscape, TV celebrities.

1. Introduction: The New National Anthem

This chapter is centred on the first episode of *Black Mirror*, which is a series produced by Zeppotron for Endemol and has been broadcast by Channel 4 since 2011. The series takes on the form of an anthology inspired by such classics as *The Twilight Zone* and *Tales of the Unexpected*. The theme which the episodes maintain in common is the influence of modern technologies of artificial life or of communication in our own lives. Its vision is distopical, in the line of a certain type of science fiction and is dyed by a corrosive satire, which sometimes borders on a parody of black humour. Its creator is Charlie Brooker, who is responsible for the comical *Death Set*, a parody of *Big Brother* mixed with an apocalyptic zombie.

In this episode, 'The National Anthem,' the main character is the British Prime Minister, who is the victim of blackmail which is broadcast in real time throughout the country; first over the Internet, and later on television: he must maintain sexual relations with a pig, 'live' before cameras, or 'The People's Princess,' a celebrity and British Duchess, will die. The episode inaugurates the series with great mastery by condensing a large quantity of thematic references which demonstrate the obsolescence of Democratic Monarchy as a political system, reducing it to a high-profile shell in the media, devoid of ideology. These references move around the images of the politician within the media, his capacity of action and the citizen's response through the new communication technologies. The situation takes on shades of an imaginary apocalypse which leads to an ending which achieves that the spectator reflects on this new order of the present day political situation where the roles of the politician-media-citizen triad have been subsequently altered.

But, also, the most singular idea of the argument is that of how this is revealed in the last part of the story, although the *modus operandi* of the blackmailing is a throwback to a certain form of international terrorism, the figure who operates behind this action is in reality an artist who has failed in his intent to attract the public (his exposition has had to close its doors three weeks earlier than planned), and who makes of this his last work before committing suicide. The image of the Prime Minister practicing an act of bestiality in front of his people, and all the process which extends from this before arriving at this point is nothing but an enormous artistic creation, a performance whose final end seems to be the creation and live broadcasting of an institutional crisis.

2. The Image of the Politician: From Throne to Reality Show

Without doubt, it was the German film director Leni Riefenstahl who established the bases of the image of politicians in the audiovisual media, and in this case in cinema, when she filmed the documentary *The Triumph of the Will* in 1934 about the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg. The propagandistic discourse surrounding the figure of Hitler and the rest of the Nazi Party High Command was consolidated through an audiovisual code which has been the reference for any other kind of political representation, independently of its ideological signs, and has been a reference which has lasted to the present day. The glorification of a leader as a Messiah, who is surrounded by the attributes of his power and by the symbols of his rank, elevates the politician to a superior status above that of all other citizens. Television later picked up on this visual paradigm and any public apparition of a states person becomes elevated to a higher and distant position from which people were addressed (i.e. the broadcasting of leadership conventions). The image was converted into the link between the transmission of power and the spoken word. Politics and its actions were out of reach of the people and the only knowledge about them was through their leader. Social and profile media evolution

changed this panorama and the politician descended symbolically from his pedestal, hiding the powerful military paraphernalia and became more human and also symbolically transferred the political scene to the media, thereby converting the present western democracies into media democracies. This change affects three integral parts of the political arena: that of the politicians themselves, the manner in which political battles are staged, and the manner in which citizens participate.

The politician is shown as a modern hero of audiovisual fiction, who offers his human side as a dimension which brings him closer to the citizen, but does not permit maintaining him in a tragic *ethos* in the Greek sense of the word. The superhuman facet in which the classic hero participates and which brings him closer to the gods clashes with the weaknesses of any mortal: passions, interests and sentiments. The present day politician exposes this human side to the electorate as a part of his identity and proximity. But, this side is ambivalent and its revelation sometimes can either turn into the fall or success of a politician, much more than his ideology or his efficiency as a leader and manager. Family and human gestures and movements, or sexual scandals, or corruption are converted into everyday matters, more than in the labour of government itself. Citizen participation through the multiple platforms which the new technologies, (Internet, Youtube, Twitter, etc), place at their disposition is as decisive as the vote in itself. Of this form we could say: 'The communication media could be on the way to, if they haven't done so already, substituting the political parties in their relationship with the people.'¹

This new setting is that which 'The National Anthem' reflects very well. The crisis brought on by the supposed terrorist act which should be resolved, not in parliament, nor in the offices, but rather on the television programme set. The buzz marketing of the new media causes the video of the Princess to be divulged at a vertiginous speed by Internet, and it is impossible to be stopped. The country is brought to a standstill waiting for the grand act, that of the great deed which the Prime Minister will carry out as a decisive political act: copulation with a pig.

The humiliating action manages to bring about a happy ending, the Princess is freed and the Prime Minister's popularity soars to new highs. However, his human side is somewhat affected. The Prime Minister and his wife, at home, behind closed doors, show their distancing from each other which is doubtlessly the reflection of the fracture caused by the recent event.

Here we find a certain similarity with narrative strategies and emotions brought about Reality Shows. The artist converts the Prime Minister and the Princess into two traditional narrative archetypes, similar to a fairytale, (the hero and the damsel in distress) codified in the 21st century by the logic of this new media, concretely by the narrative structure of the Reality Shows which establish a new form of relating with the audience. In fact, the relationship between the people and the politician appear depicted as a farce wherein he who is humiliated ends up obtaining the highest quotas of popularity at the expense of losing his own private

life, and maintains only a public appearance. The same as what occurs to a *Big Brother* contestant.

This humiliating process is born of making the old rite of hazing which was introduced in the reality programme *Jackass* much more spectacularly. Its design went beyond the tests demanded of a contestant and, even though there was no concrete finality: the programme circumscribed a grotesque exaltation of the exploration of the limits of stereotyped masculinity, where resistance to all types of tests, regardless of how humiliating or dangerous they were, was the final goal of the programme. As in *Jackass*, the true nature of the challenge which the Prime Minister is subjected to is also humiliating as a man, a husband, and a politician before the whole nation.

The idea of a politician as a contestant, subject to permanent public scrutiny and obliged to act (which is to say carrying out his own performance) for the people, is not new. In fact, it has been carried out on television in a literal manner. Meyer mentions an Argentine contest programme in 2002, 'The People's Candidate' in which the *Big Brother* format is used to find a political candidate. Later, in 2004, an American Cable TV channel broadcast 'The American Candidate,' which proposed a similar formula for the election of a White House candidate.²

The Prime Minister in *Black Mirror* is not, however, a celebrity politician in his own rite. On the other hand, the Princess who he must save (a clearly faithful representation of Kate Middleton) is as much a representative of the Monarchy as a genuine celebrity. A critical lecture is suggested about the confidence crisis in democratic political institutions, which lose the popular battle before the most traditional institutions which continue being as they are, only thanks to their high-profile media reflection: 'The People's Princess' is not so only because she is a Duchess, but fundamentally because she is a celebrity.

The unpleasant turn of events of the politician-contestant is visualised through the traditional conventions of the apocalyptic narrative: Crucial moments of the episode (those in which the politician gets closer to the final decision, and, of course to the instant in which he should carry out the last test) go back to an imaginary Apocalypse, with the images of empty London streets and of people congregated in front of television screens to watch live and direct the most absolute degradation of the hero, who has not asked to be so in this manner. A story is related having the canonic structures of introduction, body, and conclusion. We see this through the protagonist and also through the people (where the viewers and the population as a whole, are one and the same): and it is in the vision of the people where the imaginary Apocalypse appears.

Here once more, the crucial moment is conditioned by the logic of the Reality Show. Minna Aslama and Pantti Mervi describe how, as the Reality Show evolves certain situations have had to be strengthened in which the contestant finds him or herself alone and delivers a monologue to the spectator, as it is there, apparently,

where the favour of the audience is played out. So much so, that it is in these situations where the emotional strategy is made most clear.³ This is something very similar to that which the Prime Minister is obliged to do: appear alone before his people to carry out an extreme emotional act, the most naked act he could do in front of his audience.

The politician-contestant in this way incarnates a hero who saves the Princess and his political life by means of sacrificing his private life, by the same means that a *Big Brother* contestant turns over his privacy in exchange for popularity. It is the people, in fact, who determine, through the social networks and by means of constant opinion surveys, the action of the hero-contestant in an ochlocracy⁴ situation.

3. Crisis, Apocalypse and Performance

The idea which we have nowadays of the Apocalypse is that of destruction. When an apocalyptic scenario is spoken of, a devastating apocalyptic end which destroys everything known to us is suggested. However, when we get closer to the original text and in its interpretation, we find that Apocalypse does not evoke a completely devastating ending. What is really apocalyptic symbolically suggests a process of crisis, destruction and renewal. The old, the out-dated, enters into crisis and the apocalyptic act demolishes and purifies the prior state, restoring lost values and creating a new stage on which to evolve. In this way 'The National Anthem' presents an apocalyptic vision, not only by bringing together a series of images of an empty London which is paralysed by the kidnapping of the Princess, but rather presents, although in a totally postmodern manner the possibility of an end to a system of representation and political action. The traditional forms of resolving political conflicts facing citizens are now obsolete and it is the high-profile media scene that is offered as a new forum, the new plaza of the modern *polis*.

The unraveling role of the apocalyptic act is, in a new twist of the ironic screw, an artistic act, a performance, in the end another of its signs about itself towards reality, a scripted fiction, a simulation. As Teresa Aguilar explains:

through a comprehension and different execution of the representation, contemporary art understands that the action takes the place of the representation and it is in this way that performances arise, actions which maintain a clear vindication, or a directly political attitude.⁵

The *Demiurgo* in the shadow of 'The National Anthem' does not use his own body as artistic expression, but rather that of the body of the Prime Minister amplified through the different channels of the information technologies. This is to say that it obliges converting what is private into a massive public act. In this case, it is unknown whether the intention of the artist is vindicating, political or an

extreme artistic expression, but the performance, unique and ephemeral in that which 'uses a varied imagining in which the process is not centred in the transformation of the object, but rather, in the significant disposition of the object on the stage,'⁶ is converted into something permanent on the web. The price for the artist, and equally for the object, the politician, is high: one should subject oneself to an absolutely degrading act and the other commits suicide.

The Apocalypse proposed for the artistic creation is finalised, not with a regeneration of values as set out by convention, but rather with a return to the previous status quo of the same: the politician regains his popularity and the monarchical representative her agenda as a celebrity. The only actor of artistic creation who has varied in status is the artist, who has managed, through the simulation of this apocalyptic institutional crisis, the favour of the public which traditional art had denied him.

4. Conclusion

'The National Anthem' transgresses the classic narrative structure of an apocalyptic fiction given that it does not do a critique or analysis of a past moment of society, nor does it consider a renewal of values. The symbolic act of Apocalypse is post-modernly a transgression, as empty as the image of the politician. The actions lose their real ideological reference and also lose the capacity of political reaction that this supposes to the citizen who gives popular clamour as a reward in the same way as it does with a reality show contestant. But the politicians and the media are not the only ones responsible for this false apocalypse. The narration also shows how the same citizens let themselves be dragged into this situation and now do not know how to value the leader for his governing acts, but rather simply for his emotional acts, which demonstrates a loss of the concept of citizen participation such as what has been understood in western democracy up to the present day.

The new epic political-contestant hero is developed within the media. It is no longer an executive action which legitimates power (let us remember how the typical measures of control of those who govern, the violence by means of assault of the place they believed that the Princess was, have failed), but rather the test of doing away with the condition as man and politician of the Prime Minister, coerced by a superior system, incarnated in the people through the social networks.

In 'The National Anthem,' Charlie Brooker offers us a symbolic apocalypse where the British Public is not kept in suspense in face of its national anthem, but rather remains united and in silence contemplating the *The New National Anthem*. A satiric metaphor which speaks from the first episode of the corrosive talent with which will stain the analysis of the new personal, technological, communicative scenario of the 21st century in the rest of the series.

Notes

¹ Eduardo Fernández, ‘Medios de Comunicación, ¿Sustitutos de la Actividad Política?’, *Contribuciones* 2, No. 50 (1996): 19-36.

² Thomas Meyer, *Media Democracy: How the Media Colonise Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 435-436.

³ Minna Aslama and Mervi Pantti, ‘Talking Alone Reality TV, Emotions and Authenticity’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 No. 2 (2006): 175.

⁴ Ochlocracy (‘rule of the general populace’) is democracy (‘rule of the people’) spoiled by demagoguery, ‘tyranny of the majority,’ and the rule of passion over reason. Ochlocracy is synonymous in meaning and usage to the modern, informal term ‘mobocracy.’

⁵ Teresa Aguilar, ‘Cuerpo y Tecnología en el Arte Contemporáneo’, *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas* 17 (2008): 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

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Part 7

Apocalypse and Material Crises

Filming the Domestic Apocalypse: Home and Hell in Narratives of the Crisis

Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla and Silvia Herreros de Tejada

Abstract

According to Stephen J. Ross and Lary May, John Ford and Frank Capra stand out among directors linked to conversion narratives,¹ and Colin Shindler highlights the role of these directors in shaping the pattern of the American home during the New Deal, especially through *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). In these films, the main characters are ordinary people facing the destruction of their homes, menaced by an economic crisis, and they undertake a descent into Hell in order to regain their dwellings. In John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joad family makes a forced journey from Oklahoma to California as a chance to escape from starvation and loses the first generation along the way. Once at their destination, the migrants end up secluded in working camps where the grapes of wrath are harvested, an image taken from Revelation (14:19). In Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, a desperate George Bailey travels to an inferno of non-existence in Pottersville, and the vanishing of his own home operates a purification that allows him to return to Bedford Falls: the idealised American city of New Deal. Seven decades later, the archetype of the domestic apocalypse and its link between home and hell can be noticed in films directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, Jason Reitman or Tom McCarthy, such as *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), *Up in the Air* (2009) or *The Visitor* (2007). These filmmakers explore the social trends of a country, first shocked by the social trauma of 9/11, and seven years later by a worldwide economic collapse. This chapter aims to explore the presence and use of this domestic imaginary within Hollywood's independent film industry: stories of ordinary citizens whose homes are menaced or doomed by the recent crisis.

Key Words: Economic collapse, narratives of the crisis, descent into hell, film depiction, American home, Indiewood, John Ford, Frank Capra.

1. An Apocalyptic Popular Imaginary

The settlement of the Pilgrim Fathers on the New England Coast is usually assumed as the beginning of the American epic but, according to Peter Stearns, the European colonists that landed in November 1620 also brought an endemic fear that would later afflict the new nation: the anxiety towards the destruction of the home.²

Stearns believes that four centuries later, this fear is still the most active in North American society; so much so, that it can be labelled as a current living

subculture.³ The United States has become the collective home of those immigrants that – in their search for prosperity – have wished to fulfil a project either as colonists, or pioneers: what is collectively known as the American Dream within the national imaginary. But the dream can become a nightmare and thus, Stearns identifies several standard threats against the home: fears towards race, immigration, socialism, the federal government's power and above all, the fear towards invasion and nuclear destruction.⁴ Besides, Stearns also detects that, at present, the apocalyptic fear towards punishment has increased:

Strong elements would surface in American revivalism and in anticipations of the 2000 millennium (and even now, as we await the Mayan 2012). Widespread minority beliefs in the imminence of the second Coming and the end of the World – which mix fear and exultation – continue to reveal this stubborn current.⁵

On 9/11, the citizens' worst fears came true. Suddenly, the horrors prophesised by political analysts, millennialism psychosis and Hollywood movies became a reality. Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan enhance the irony of an incredibly popular genre that repeatedly destroyed cities and national symbols and transformed America into a desolate apocalyptic landscape: a creative phenomenon that emerged long before 9/11, but that kept appearing afterwards although in a very different socio-political context.⁶

This threat regarding the population and the psychological effects of catastrophe, however, does not only appear in what are commonly known as 'disaster movies,' but also in a number of plots that connect with the apocalyptic popular imaginary.⁷ The recent economic collapse of around 2008 and the subsequent worldwide crisis have been an imminent threat to American homes, conveyed through family tragedies such as unemployment, bankruptcy, eviction or forced emigration: symptoms of a domestic apocalypse that, all in all, imply the failure of the American Dream and revive the times of the Great Depression.

2. Domestic Threat in the New Deal Cinema

Among the Horsemen of the apocalypse, American society has always considered war as the worst domestic menace: from the fear of invasion in colonial times, to the upheaval of the Cold War, to the recent terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, seven decades earlier, the 1929 Wall Street Crash unleashed the havoc of another Horseman – starvation – at a time when president Herbert Hoover's prevailing political discourse paradoxically enhanced the nation's prosperity.

Within the unquiet atmosphere of the Great Depression, part of Hollywood empathised with the peoples' troubles and, according to Ross, promoted the appearance of the so-called 'conversion narratives': a multicultural cinema, that brought about 'a new, inclusive democratic ethos which heralded the equality of all

citizens and called for cooperation between previously hostile groups of elites and outsiders.⁸ John Ford, Frank Capra, King Vidor, Mervin LeRoy and William Wyler were amongst the directors that sponsored this social initiative while leaving the studio system behind and reformulating both dramatic archetypes and national myths. In this rewriting of the social icons, the imaginary of the North American home in times of an unparalleled crisis was reconfigured by means of the cinema. Richard Selcer enhances the importance of this new conception for national identity and conscience:

During good times in our history, it [the home] has been a symbol of everything good in American life. During the bad times, its status has been used as a yardstick for the decline of America.⁹

Ford and Capra stand out among the directors that reshaped the archetype of the home during the New Deal's most critical years. In their films, the main characters are ordinary heroes whose homes are threatened or lost and who, after suffering a domestic apocalypse, embark on their reconstruction. In this peculiar dramatic process, we can identify the four stages that articulate 'disaster movies': destruction, descent into hell, purification and re-foundation. This structure appears in both Ford and Capra's most emblematic films: *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

In both stories, the heroes deal with the search or reconstruction of the lost home via family, epic struggle and the idea of America as a common domestic space. According to Robert B. Ray, this triad coincides with the three traditional polarities in American mythology and literature: adventure/domesticity, worldly success/ordinary life, and individual/community.¹⁰ Following this approach, George Bailey, *It's a Wonderful Life's* family man, responds to Capra's typical Odysseus-hero, for he wishes to recover his home and his country undamaged. On the other hand, the Joad family in Ford's film is portrayed as a collective hero with Virgilian reminiscences, for – just as Aeneas and his fellows – they cover a dangerous voyage towards a promised land. In both cases, the echoes of the eternal American epic are clear enough.

3. California and Pottersville: Ford and Capra's Infernos

The Grapes of Wrath deals with the exodus of an Oklahoma family of farmers during the years of the Great Depression. The Joads are expelled from their estate and embark upon a journey in order to flee from poverty and reach California, their particular land of milk and honey. On board a timeworn van, three generations of 'Okies' join the caravans that cover Route 66, crossing Texas, New Mexico and Arizona – nearly half the country – in order to suffer a terrible disappointment when they arrive at their destiny, for what the promised land offers is an inhuman

life of collective confinement under police surveillance. The literal devastation of the Joad farm alludes to the first stage of domestic apocalypse (destruction), followed by a voyage (descent into hell) that will cost the grandparents' life, the first generation. The destruction, poverty and dearth of the trip finally work a catharsis in the family (purification), that strengthens their bonds and that – in spite of the hostility with which they are received in California – confirms the social and moral grounds of the new America (re-foundation).

Through the characters of Tom and Ma Joad, Ford reconfigures the domestic archetype's three elements – family, epic struggle, and America – in the film's resolution, and extrapolates them from a domestic to a community scope. Tom, the eldest son, leaves his home in order to fight the country's injustice, while Ma Joad, on the other hand, rises throughout the film to end up assuming the patriarchal power that seemed to have disappeared with the grandfather's death. According to Tag Gallagher, the film can be summarised as 'the transformation of the Joad family from a patriarchy rooted in the earth to a matriarchy uprooted on the road.'¹¹ Ford believed that the clan's mother should bring an end to the screenplay, thus symbolising the family union and foreseeing the triumph of society over the agonies of the Depression.

Capra, from a different dramatic perspective, proposes another example of domestic apocalypse in *It's a Wonderful Life*: one that features a homely kind of heroism and the compromise with social justice. This Christmas fable tells the story of George Bailey, a family man who has never left his city, Bedford Falls, and who has sacrificed his own life ambitions – trips, adventures, a career, employment, a honeymoon – to render a service to his neighbours via his company, Building & Loan. George grants small loans to those who are too poor to receive proper credits from the local bank; thus, he 'builds' homes. However, when George suffers a setback that might take him to jail, he abandons his moral codes and tries to commit suicide.

Just like in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the angel Clarence leads George through the hell of non-existence, showing him the mayhems of the world had he never been born. The destruction of his home and the descent to Hades happen in the alternate reality of Pottersville (a hellish icon of the Great Depression's corrupted America), but also works a purification in the protagonist who, after a moment of doubt, manages to resume the task of securing his neighbours' homes. Regarding the aforementioned triad of adventure/domesticity, worldly success/ordinary life and individual/community, Ray asserts that the American domestic imaginary has always preferred the successful individual adventurer to the common homely man: 'The goal of *It's a Wonderful Life* was to liberate George, and the audience, from the frustrations caused by this desire, which the film identified as mistaken.'¹²

This goal can be considered as one of the New Deal's conversion narratives most significant contributions. Just as in the California portrayed by John Ford –

where the grapes of wrath are harvested – Pottersville brings together the destruction of two homes, the domestic and the national. As Ray concludes:

The overt intent of *It's a Wonderful Life* was to acknowledge George's dilemma and then solve it, to reaffirm the American Dream by showing that the conflicts between opposed values were illusory. To succeed, the film had to demonstrate that a domestic, responsible, ordinary life contained possibilities for adventure, heroism, and success.¹³

4. *Little Miss Sunshine*: Divorce, Bankruptcy and Suicide

After the economic collapse of around 2008, independent cinema started to focus on narratives of homes in crisis by means of alternate formulas that aimed to diverge from commercial approaches. Films like Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris' *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), Tom McCarthy's *The Visitor* (2007) and *Win Win* (2011) and Jason Reitman's *Up in the Air* (2009) convey homes on the verge of destruction, and in order to do so, make use of the imaginaries that were forged in the 1930s and consolidated in the 40s. These films can be said to in fact drink from the domestic apocalypse created by Ford and Capra in which the family home drama was extended to the national common home.

Little Miss Sunshine, for instance, is a road movie that transferred the re-foundation journey of *The Grapes of Wrath* to the odd epic of the Hoovers¹⁴ in their trip from New Mexico to California. The Hoover family, in a rickety van, also travel towards the promised land in search of a dream: the unlikely success of their youngest member, the 7-year-old Olive, in an inter-state beauty pageant à la Miss America.

The three generations of Hoovers – in the manner of Ford and Steinbeck's Okies – confront a disastrous vital and economic future and suffer identical mishaps in their journey through the West: the grandfather's death, trouble with the police, hunger, mechanical problems and, above all, a hostile welcome and subsequent deception at their arrival in California. The premise of *Little Miss Sunshine* is based on an allegorical descent into hell, for every family member that travels in the van is a complete failure. The Hoovers' frustration is verbalised by the teenage son in only three words: divorce, bankruptcy and suicide.

Once at the girl's beauty pageant in Los Angeles, Dayton and Faris display a caricature of the remnants of the American Dream. The Hoovers incur the audience's wrath when Olive innocently performs the provocative dance taught by her grandfather. But the spontaneous response of the family – who join her in the dance – reveals the clan's transformation. Temporarily free from their personal failures, they share a common triumph: their gathering as a family in order to protect Olive. In this reconstruction of the home, the personal apocalypse is

overcome and the family reunites (re-foundation) so as to encourage the little girl's dreams.

California, the promised land, seems to be the perfect frame for this reflection on success in times of crisis. When they arrive at the hotel, the Hoovers discover the poignancy of a contest in which little girls are supposed to behave like miniature beauty queens. The version of the hymn 'America the Beautiful' exhibits a corrupted social mentality in which success is equivalent to the exaltation of appearance, and where people – little girls, in this case – are dehumanised and reduced to objects. In his sociological analysis of the film, Bernard Beck talks about the moral superiority and heroic attitude that links the Hoovers and the Joads, especially in how they overcome their loser complex in an inhuman and competitive society:

In this movie, the joke is on the mainstream world of success and efficacy, warped, ambitious, spiteful, and lonely. The dysfunctional family, bless their hearts, in contrast, are warm, happy and together.¹⁵

5. The Conversion of the Apocalyptic Agent

In 2009, the crisis in full swing, director Jason Reitman created a protagonist for *Up in the Air* who was the ideal antithesis of the Capraesque hero. In the film, Ryan Bingham is an agent of domestic apocalypse and therefore, a destructor of the American dream. While George Bailey provided humble citizens with a home, Ryan Bingham makes his living travelling to workplaces around the U.S. informing workers of their dismissals. The former is firmly committed to social rights while the latter delivers motivational speeches exalting the virtues of a life free of burdens. While George empathises with his neighbours' bad luck, Ryan provokes it remorselessly.

Ryan, at the same time, seems to be moulded as the diabolical version of the angel Clarence: a sort of exterminator homeless angel that lurks around airports, incapable of commitment, and deciding on the destiny of poor mortgage-bound mortals. The character, in fact, seems to represent the seductive side of Ray's triple paradox of adventure/domesticity, worldly success/ordinary life, and individual/community:

Despite American culture's apparent impartiality, the successful, individual adventurer has clearly won the competition for the American imagination – at the expense of the man who did the quiet work at home.¹⁶

Reitman's film presents Ryan's victims descent into hell (specifically via bankruptcy and suicide). However, it is the apocalyptic agent of *Up in the Air* who

will end up assuming the void – expressed through the airport metaphor – and thus, experiencing purification. The importance of family bonds becomes patently clear within the social and economic struggle in the film's context and, as Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano point out, directors like Reitman dramatise the world crisis by means of a humanisation of the conflict: 'Detachment and family are what matter in this drama, as in so much of the mass-culture response to the crisis.'¹⁷

Up in the Air, thus, narrates the efforts of a cynic to escape from the inferno noir of Pottersville (the city that he has actually built) and return to Bedford Falls – the idealised American city of the New Deal – in order to build his own home. According to the conventional domestic archetype, the screenplay starts from an allegorical description of the United States as a common home to finally end in the domestic home that the purified Ryan wishes to establish, but does not manage to obtain. There is, however, a hopeful message by the end of the film: an epilogue of interviews in which the recently dismissed – victims of the economic collapse – talk about their families as a tangible refuge.

6. Domestic Re-Foundation and Social Empathy

Little Miss Sunshine and *Up in the Air* are examples of modern conversion narratives in times of crisis, and they both use the classical dramatic premise of the domestic apocalypse as the basis of the social analysis they seek to carry out. Director Tom McCarthy, to that same effect, chooses stories of homeless characters in a context of crisis in his films *The Visitor* and *Win Win*. *The Visitor* takes place in an America recently hit by 9/11 and about to suffer the economic collapse: after the disaster, a recently widowed American overcomes his isolation by helping a young Syrian immigrant to avoid deportation. In this film, McCarthy confronts the efforts of two characters in rebuilding their homes while he criticises the immigration policies derived from unprecedented security measures.

Within a domestic apocalypse setting, McCarthy stresses the final stage of reconstruction and chooses post-9/11 America as a post-apocalyptic scenery. He wards off the fear towards the 'other' – as pointed out by Stearns¹⁸ – and suggests that if a young Syrian can heal the personal trauma of a professor from Connecticut (family home), the opening-up towards foreigners may help to overcome a social trauma (national home). As Joyce K. Heyraud observes:

Walter and Tarek gradually forge an unlikely friendship connected through unspoken mutual compassion. The nature of the bond between the two men begs the question of who is visiting whom. Despite Tarek's lack of a physical home, it is he who is most at home in the world and Walter who is the transient visitor.¹⁹

If the spirit of the Joads clearly hovered over *The Visitor*, McCarthy's second contribution, *Win Win*, presents a home devastated by crisis from a more Capraesque point of view. The story relates the efforts of the main character, Mike Flaherty – a family man based on George Bailey – to survive in a financially disastrous environment. And the director concludes that only social empathy and the reinforcement of the domestic home can strengthen the national one, the true meeting point of citizens from foreign cultures (*The Visitor*) or from the same country (*Win Win*). Regarding the last scene of this film, McCarthy reflects that:

The real victory maybe speaks to more of what the real American dream is – three kids on a lawn, playing croquet and that's it. For a lot of people in the world, that's a victory. Seeing your children hang out, play safely, enjoying their lives and knowing that they have a future.²⁰

Again, as in *The Visitor*, McCarthy enhances his tendency towards building stories from the re-foundation or consolidation stage of the threatened home. This is a tendency that has been present in the American film history since the days of the Great Depression which reveals that, in narratives of the crisis – when the worst of times come upon us – home can sometimes become hell.

Notes

¹ Steven Ross, *Movies and American Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 128; and Lary May, 'Confronting the Great Depression: Renewing Democracy in Hard Times', *Movies and American Society*, ed. Steven Ross (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 129-158.

² Peter N. Stearns, *American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 74.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 173-174.

⁵ Peter N. Stearns, 'Targeting American Fear', *Revue Française d'Études Américaines* 3, No. 125 (2010): 10.

⁶ Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁷ This is why when approaching destruction plots in cinema it is more appropriate to speak of 'apocalyptic settings' or 'apocalyptic visions' rather than the mere catastrophe genre. See Wheeler W. Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

⁸ Steven Ross, *Movies and American Society*, 128-129.

- ⁹ Richard Selcer, 'Home Sweet Movies', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Summer 18, No. 2 (1990): 55.
- ¹⁰ Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 185.
- ¹¹ Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: The Man and His Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 193.
- ¹² Ray, *A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema*, 186-187.
- ¹³ Ibid., 199-200.
- ¹⁴ A surname that is ironically linked to the myth of 'prosperity'.
- ¹⁵ Bernard Beck, 'Our Dancing Daughters: The Queen, Little Miss Sunshine and Dysfunctional Families', *Multicultural Perspectives* 9, No. 4 (2007): 30-31.
- ¹⁶ Ray, *A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema*, 186.
- ¹⁷ Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano, 'Filming the Crisis: A Survey', *Film Quarterly* 65, No. 1 (Fall, 2011): 44.
- ¹⁸ Stearns, 'Targeting American Fear', 9-12.
- ¹⁹ Joyce K. Heyraud, 'The Visitor 2008: Written and Directed by Tom McCarthy', *Psychological Perspectives* 51 (2008): 367.
- ²⁰ Jeff Goldsmith, 'Constructing a Win Win', *Creative Screenwriting* (March/April, 2011): 19.

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Apocalyptic Landscapes in Times of Crisis: Aesthetic Connections between Fiction Cinema and Documentary Images Based on Reality

Raúl Álvarez Gómez and Araceli Rodríguez Mateos

Abstract

The economic crisis of recent years has generated an uninterrupted stream of documentary images that portrays its social impact in some Western countries. Meanwhile, fiction cinema has developed new visions of apocalypse. This chapter explores the aesthetic and thematic connections between both kinds of discourses: the apocalyptic imaginary and the imaginary emerging from the social impact of the crisis. It focuses on Spanish cinema as the best example of this interaction. The films analysed are *3 Días*, directed by F. Javier Gutiérrez (2008), *Fin*, directed by Jorge Torregrassa (2012), and *Los Últimos Días*, directed by Álex and David Pastor (2012).

Key Words: Apocalypse, crisis, information, Spanish cinema, photography, documentary.

1. Introduction

In today's audiovisual culture, films have contributed to how we imagine the end of the world. Although the production of apocalyptic narratives is notable and has shaped something of a tradition since the 1950s, we cannot point to a specific genre. From both the thematic and aesthetic standpoints, the typology of films related to the concept of the apocalypse is diverse.

The narratives to be considered are the ones that tackle the end of the world. That is, the apocalypse as a substantive, plausible phenomenon. Charles P. Mitchell establishes eight categories of films whose common denominator is the existence of a global threat.¹ But there are other films that, without dealing with the final annihilation, present elements that we could consider apocalyptic because they are associated with that imaginary of devastation or catastrophe. That is, tales in which the apocalyptic operates as an adjective. Films that present a post-apocalyptic scenario and those that recreate natural or man-made disasters such as war or terrorism would fit into this category. Both connect with the broad concepts of 'apocalyptic imaginary' or 'apocalyptic vision.'²

Traditionally, this type of cinema has emerged in sociopolitical contexts that are fraught with tension. Over the past 15 years, production has revived in an international arena marked by terrorist attacks, the 'war on terror,' new nuclear threats, epidemics, climate change, financial collapse and the resulting economic crisis.³ It is not difficult to understand that this historic context is conducive to

apocalyptic visions, which are further fed by a fatalistic, nearly mystical feeling linked with such phenomena as the '2000 effect,' millenarianism and diverse prophecies regarding the end of the world.

This chapter aims to explore the connections between the apocalyptic fiction of recent years and the setting in which it has arisen. Specifically, the links are studied between the apocalyptic imaginary and the imaginary emerging from the social impact of the intense recession that some Western countries are experiencing. The media have issued an uninterrupted stream of documentary images that diagnose the characteristics of the debacle while they serve as testimony to the dramatic effects suffered by the population. To what extent is apocalyptic fiction permeable to that informative and documental discourse?

To approach the question, we will analyse the case of Spain, which is especially interesting from the standpoint of this study. Because Spain is suffering the economic crisis with special intensity, the crisis and its effects largely dominate the audiovisual and graphic news. It is striking that, precisely during these years, Spanish filmmakers are producing apocalyptic films, when they had never explored this subject before.

2. The Apocalypse in Spanish Cinema

The production of apocalyptic movies in Spain's film industry is a new phenomenon that is virtually exclusive to the last five years (2007-2012). Before this, there had been no sign of a sustained current of films showing the end of the world or the after-effects of a great catastrophe. Some isolated authors in very divergent periods have made forays into dystopian scenarios. These include Álex de la Iglesia's *Acción Mutante* (1992), Juan Piquer Simón's *La Grieta* (1990), José María Forqué's *Nexus 2431* (1994), Agustín Villaronga's *El Niño de la Luna* (1989), and Óscar Aibar's *Atolladero* (1995). But there was no continued trend over time of films presenting the Armageddon.

This scenario changed in 2007 with the premiere of *[Rec]*, a horror film that portrays the outbreak of a zombie pandemic in Barcelona. Although its plot does not lead to the end of the world, its co-directors, Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, suggest that the end could come if the zombie protagonists of the film manage to escape from the building in which they are confined and fan out over the planet. *[Rec]* is also important because it introduces an apocalyptic aesthetic that serves as a referent for subsequent films that do show the destruction of our planet.

Once the influence of *[Rec]* is accepted, we need to focus on three films that directly present the end of human life. And they do this, perhaps not by chance, in the midst of a context of deep recession that, in Spain, has incited scenes with apocalyptic connotations.

The films under study here are: *3 Días* (2008) directed by F. Javier Gutiérrez, *Fin* (2012) directed by Jorge Torregrassa and *Los Últimos Días* (2012) directed by Álex and David Pastor. Their makers are young directors who are familiar with

American genre cinema, and specifically with fantastic films, whose codes and conventions they adopt and transfer to the context of Spanish production. Some of them, moreover, participate in the Hollywood industry.⁴

3. Documentary Visions of the Crisis

In parallel with these three films, the imaginary is developing that narrates the effects of the recession on Spanish society. Timidly at first, but with increasing fluidity in the past two years, this imaginary has taken shape based on television news programmes, documentary films and the graphic work of photojournalists.

Because the motifs are constant, the main thrusts of this documentary discourse are easy to identify. On one hand, there are the unfinished buildings in suburbs, coastal areas or rural moors. This image, linked to the bursting of the real estate bubble, is the icon that sums up the economic crisis in Spain. Connected with this reality are the portraits of paralysis in the most heavily impacted industries: abandoned factories and jobless workers lined up in front of the government employment offices. A notable example of such portrayals is the photo reportage published by Jasper Juinen in *The Guardian*, titled 'Spanish Unemployment Crisis – in Pictures.'⁵

Following the logic of unemployment, the reporters show the impoverishment that a large portion of the population suffers. Their photographs of citizens pawing through garbage bins in search of food have been published in international media. Others have appeared that relate the drama of people being evicted from their homes as the result of mortgage foreclosures or failure to pay rent. Two reportages published by Samuel Aranda in *The New York Times* are good examples of this depiction.⁶ Impoverishment is shown in all its brutal reality in the Spanish news media: from the services provided to citizens in charity centres to the suicides of desperate individuals and the scenes of emotional tension during evictions.

Another thematic thrust could be found in the mass protest demonstrations against the role of the economic, political and institutional powers in the genesis and management of the crisis. The campaign organised by indignant citizens ('los indignados'), known as the 15M movement, began to make people's unrest visible on the streets in 2011. Other protest initiatives have followed, one after the other, since then. Quite often the media print and broadcast images of disturbances, even violent confrontations between demonstrators and police officers. Without issuing any judgments for now on the interest in generating that discourse, it is a flow of images that evokes social disorder and conflict.

In both its aesthetic and thematic aspects, this imaginary connects with elements of the apocalyptic visions established in audiovisual culture, especially in the cinema. In the following paragraphs we will analyse the interrelation between the two.

4. The Aesthetic of the Recession in the End-of-the-World Narrative

The first of the cited films, *3 Días*, was produced during the year that saw the financial collapse of Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. (2008). Its effect on the economy would take some time to make itself felt, but in Spain there were already worrisome signs. Apart from the known economic data, in the rural and urban areas, Spaniards had become accustomed to living in a landscape under construction, teeming with concrete skeletons and cranes. The speculative bubble was inflated to the bursting point, and it was not difficult to guess that it would explode.

Precisely in this context of optimism with a shadow cast over it, the cinema offered a story of the end of the world. The action is set in a small Andalusian town at some point in the 1980s. It imagines a dystopian world: a meteorite advances toward the earth and the television announces the inexorable end, which will take place in three days. This apocalyptic situation serves as a framework for the development of a thriller in which a child-murdering psychopath takes advantage of the reigning civic chaos to escape from prison and return to take revenge on the person who captured him by attempting to kill his four children. Their uncle will confront him in a desperate struggle to survive and protect the threatened children. He succeeds, but the global threat is fulfilled when the meteorite collides with the earth, destroying everything.

The film invites the spectator to reflect on human nature in the face of ineluctably approaching doom: evil, in the form of murderous revenge, opposed to good, embodied in the redeeming heroic action that offers some hope. Within this dramatic approach, the film includes some elements that connect surprisingly with the documentary imaginary of the recession, which was further developed later. The approach to tragedy has the rural environment as a referent. The hasty abandonment by the townspeople after the announcement of the end leaves the village empty, lifeless – a ghost town. In its streets only the remains left by that flight can be found. Everything is paralysed; the cement factory on the edge of town is now nothing more than a ruinous abandoned building. A place with no resources and, therefore, without hope.

When we see them in perspective, it is easy to connect these scenarios with documentary images of the experience of the recession in the rural world. Let us return to the Jasper Juinen's photo essay, for example.⁷ With an objective style, Juinen describes a town of La Mancha paralysed by the breakdown of its economic engine. Villacañas is pictured from afar as a solitary population emerging from the mist of dawn. Its door factories are deserted, abandoned and ruinous, its formerly bustling downtown streets are empty at nightfall, and the waiters have no one to serve in the bars. The townspeople survive in their houses, living under a regime that approaches a wartime economy. Beyond the drama of unemployment and impoverishment, which are also visible, the photographic account has apocalyptic

glints. In some way, reality and fiction seem to feed back into each other in their respective discourses.

The second film, *Fin*, reached the screen in 2012, perhaps the most critical year of the economic crisis in Spain. In the midst of a panorama marked by ceaseless rumours of a possible economic rescue by Brussels, exorbitant jobless figures and cases of political corruption, director Jorge Torregrossa delivered a film in which the end of the world is the central theme of the narrative. A group of friends get together to enjoy a weekend in a country house. The first night, while they recount old anecdotes around a campfire, a series of strange lightning flashes light up the sky, causing a major power failure. Isolated, without mobile phones or cars, the friends walk to the nearest town to try to find out what is going on. One by one they disappear in what turns out to be an Armageddon of prophetic resonances.

The staging of this story contains dramatic elements and visual resources that connect the portrayal of the end of the world proposed by the director with some of the recurrent documentary images of the recession in Spain and the possible causes of the disaster. The odyssey undertaken by the leading characters takes place first in a natural environment and then in a coastal town, both bereft of human life, where instead of people, the inhabitants are wild animals that show a disquieting aggressiveness toward humans. This element, of an ecological nature, is interesting inasmuch as it suggests that the end times will sweep away all traces of human life to give the planet back to its legitimate owners.

As the action draws near the town, Torregrossa explores in increasing depth, on the narrative and symbolic levels, the possible causes of the characters' disappearance. If, on one hand, it seems obvious that the dramatic explanation is a stellar phenomenon that has caused the global power failure and, therefore, left all technological devices useless, on the other hand, the script makes the characters disappear into thin air – they cease to exist – as punishment for their lack of human values. Egotism, ambition, self-delusion, fear, lies and lack of solidarity are shown as the ultimate reasons for the apocalypse. It is not difficult to transfer this reflection to the reality of the Spanish economic crisis, in which real estate speculation, evictions and corruption are closely tied to the lack of moral principles. The apocalypse is thus linked to the erosion of the most fundamental social and humanistic values.

Rounding out this metaphor is the character of the Prophet, a member of the group who is reviled by nearly all of them because they consider him mentally ill. This figure suffers apocalyptic visions and tries to warn his companions of the implacable fate that awaits them. The power failure, however, causes him to have an accident that prevents him from arriving in time to warn his old friends. Curiously, his lifeless body does not disappear; he leaves, as a mute witness to his premonitions, a drawing pad containing illustrations that anticipate the disappearance of each of the group members. The Prophet can thus be interpreted as the silenced conscience of the crisis; he is the voice that alerts people to the

problem and is shunted aside because he tarnishes the canvas of false prosperity. Until reality prevails and the end comes, that is.

The year 2012 also saw the premiere of *Los Últimos Días*, written and directed by Àlex and David Pastor. Set in an apocalyptic Barcelona, a plague appears that is manifested as a form of agoraphobia capable of causing death to all who venture into an open space. As a result of this circumstance, the leading characters wander through the bowels of the Catalan capital, condemned to survive in the sewers, the subway system or dilapidated shopping malls and office buildings. The central figure of the film is Marc, a young man who wants to find his girlfriend among the remains of the catastrophe. He is aided in his search by Enrique, a successful executive who finds redemption in his final sacrifice for Marc.

The concrete visual representation of the effects of the plague abounds in the clichés used in this sort of film. We see deserted streets and avenues, buildings in flames, abandoned cars and the progressive takeover of the urban environment by nature. The Pastor brothers, however, enrich the staging with certain elements that connect the aesthetic of the film with the documentary images of the economic crisis in Spain. The civil disturbances, the class warfare that pits rich against poor, the hunger, the lack of economic resources, the demonstrations and protests, the despair and the absence of faith in a better future flourish in a series of sequences that could just as well belong to a television newscast or a photographic report on current events. And to crown this visual display of chaos and anarchy, the script creates a feeling of fear and uncertainty that portrays the citizens' sentiments as they face the apocalypse. In real Spain, that same fear grips the lives of many individuals confronted by banking abuses, miserable salaries and a future promising unemployment.

Marc's drama is the loss of his girlfriend, Julia, who is emblematic of an Arcadian past of wine and roses, innocence and freedom from worries. Her memory, shown in flashbacks, suggests to the spectator that happiness is not eternal, and that it behooves us to fight for what we love to protect and safeguard it. Marc searches for his partner among the ruins left by the plague, the innards of a modern, vigorous Barcelona, a referent of progress and economic prosperity, now converted into a monster with feet of clay. The parallelism with reality seems obvious: free market prosperity rests on speculative foundations that can easily collapse. As in *Fin*, Àlex and David Pastor call for a return to humanistic values as the true motors of social well-being.

This aspect is also developed through the changes in Enrique's character. After the bubble of his prosperity bursts, the former man of success has become just another face in the crowd, a pariah who, despite the disaster, tries to prevail over the rest. His immorality ends up surrendering before the integrity shown by Marc, and his final sacrifice can be understood as a belated realisation of the error of his ways. The epilogue of the film opens a window of hope when it reveals that Marc and Julia's son, as well as the other survivors' children, are immune to

agoraphobia. Perhaps this is a metaphor whose tenor is that the current economic crisis has wounded society so deeply that only the next generation will be able to breathe a less corrupted atmosphere.

5. Conclusions

The current economic crisis has inspired in Spanish cinema new visions of the apocalypse. This imaginary logically incorporates the clichés of movies about the end of the world, and, more importantly, certain aesthetic and thematic keys present in the contemporary informative discourse. This influence is mutual, so that there is a feedback of both narratives, fiction and documentary, in parallel constructions. Fiction gives an allegorical dimension to this phenomenon of large-scale crisis, one which is even more negative and hopeless, so is easy for the viewer to connect crisis and apocalypse.

This phenomenon is not unique to Spanish cinema. In recent years, Hollywood has produced some apocalyptic films that also show this dramatic and formal dialogue with the worst aspects of the crisis. Titles like *World War Z*, *2012*, *Looper*, *Oblivion*, *Total Recall*, *Elysium*, and *Dredd* are good examples of this. Given the extent and distribution of these films, this opens up a new field of study.

Notes

¹ Charles P. Mitchell, *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema* (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 11.

² Wheeler W. Dixon, *Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 1-20.

³ Douglas Kellner, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 80-98.

⁴ The Pastor brothers shot the apocalyptic horror film *Infected* (2009) and Gutierrez also prepares a new version of the apocalyptic *The Crow* (not released yet).

⁵ Jasper Juinen, photographer, 'Spanish Unemployment Crisis – in Pictures', *The Guardian*, 30 November 2012, accessed 2 December 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2012/nov/30/spanish-unemployment-crisis-in-pictures?CMP=tw_t_gu#/?picture=400273228&index=0.

⁶ Samuel Aranda, 'In Spain, Austerity and Hunger', *The New York Times*, 24 September 2012, accessed 25 September 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2012/09/24/world/europe/20120925-SPAIN.html?_r=0#1; Samuel Aranda, 'Evictions on the Rise in Spain', *The New York Times*, 11 November 2012, accessed 14 November 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2012/11/09/world/europe/20121110-SPAIN.html?ref=europe&_r=0.

⁷ Webpage of the photographer, Jasper Juinen, accessed 4 December 2012, <http://www.jasperjuinen.nl/frame.php?itemId=5130229>.

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Facing the Global Financial Crisis and the Great Recession: The Biopic as a Socio-Cultural Response to the Collapse

Marta Frago

Abstract

As several authors have pointed out, the biopic is a recurrent genre in time of social, political or economic uncertainty. Biopics are also particularly able to include aspects of recent history. Through real people's lives, these films may project images of what is happening today, what could have been avoided or what may occur later. In addition, there are biopics that portray not only individuals, but also a whole period of time. Today, the rise of biopics in mainstream cinema also seems to be connected to the present global crisis. To verify this hypothesis, this chapter analyses those biopics produced in the last five years that contain some socio-cultural responses to the crisis. For this purpose, only those feature films that have been released internationally in recent years with significant box office success will be considered. Aspects that will be analysed are: the biopic type, the adulatory tone, the realistic or ironic-satiric point of view, the origin of the protagonist's fame, the chosen segment of the main character's life, and the narrative perspective.

Key Words: Biopic, social crisis, global recession, economic uncertainty, mainstream cinema, depiction of contemporary history.

1. Introduction

The biopic as a film genre is still popular today, in spite of having experienced several fluctuations over time. This genre enjoyed a golden age at the time of Hollywood's *studio system*. However, it also has gone through periods in which it was hardly taken into consideration, as indeed happened in the 1960s and the 1970s, when it virtually disappeared from film theaters.¹ Nor have its conventions and canons been stable. In fact, they have undergone some variation over the years. The most productive ages in biopics coincide more often than not with periods of political, social and economic turmoil.²

It seems that the biopic genre has been revitalised since the year 2000. The presence of biographies in mainstream cinema has remained firm in the last few years. Furthermore, some of these films have won major awards, placing the biopic at one of its best moments.³

This resurgence of the genre has often been linked to marketing or business reasons as well as to the fact that biopics are all the rage in film production circles. However, other important factors must be taken into account, such as possible causes of a sociological, political or cultural nature, as was the case in the past.

More specifically, the new film biographies tend to reflect the phase of insecurity that the western world has been going through in the aftermath of 9/11. On the other hand, we find that biopics have also been dealing with the overall economic and financial crisis present in the last five years.

The following pages have been written with the aim of exploring this last aspect, by studying some biopics that have been successfully released internationally from 2008 to 2012. We will only focus on political biopics, including kings and social leaders. They are those that have most clearly increased in proportion. Besides, these films usually leave room for indirect allusion to today's social and political dilemmas. Through the conflicts faced by the protagonists of these films as well as their attitudes and dialogues it is possible to see some parallels with the struggles in which today's leaders are involved.⁴

The choice of films is varied: there are historical figures, but also living people whose biographies are somehow controversial. These biopics also show differences in their narrative construction, and in their tone, style or focus. However, the perspective taken for this study has allowed us to group them in two categories depending on whether audiences may identify their protagonists as desirable leaders for our time or if they see them as the antithesis of good leadership.

2. The Biopic as a Representation of a Period of Time

In general, the representation of a famous person's life projects a wider field of influence than what could be learnt at first about any specific life. A biopic does not merely take into account biographical aspects such as prestige and social relevance. Nor is it just a question of whether or not the person's profile can be adjusted to the film's narrative patterns, or whether life rights are easily attainable and no legal obstruction exists. There are other less functional reasons to be taken into consideration, such as the connection – either conscious or unconscious – between the character and current issues, the fit between his or her life and society's shared images and values, and, lastly, the relationship between this life and the universal truth about human nature.

Rosenstone, who has studied this genre within the historical film, explains how it is inevitable that filmmakers introduce some sort of interpretation during the process of creating the biopic:

Biographer and filmmaker both appropriate some of the trace details left by a life and weave them into a story whose theme infuses meaning into the days of their subject. The resulting work is ultimately based less on the raw data than on that data incorporated into a vision created by the literary or filmic skills of the biographer.⁵

This happens, says Toplin, because narratively speaking there is a tendency to compare the life of a famous person to some sort of myth: freedom, the south, the west, the frontier, and so on. It may also be that we find a comparison within universal culture: David fighting Goliath, the dignity of the poor in confronting the rich, etc.: ‘References to myths strengthen the dramatic force of storytelling and help audiences to sense the relationship of specific problems to broader issues.’⁶ Besides, those questions raised by biographies connect with the present moment, since – as filmmakers know – they must be the expression of the views, dreams and hopes of today’s audience. ‘They tap into cultural myths (...). They provide idealized mirror images for our identification,’ as Dennis Bingham says.⁷

Historical biographies have in many cases brought out implicit messages for the present time. An example of this is *Sergeant York*, a 1941 film that brings to light an American World War I hero at a time when the USA was being encouraged to take part in World War II. At other times, the controversies of the present have been expressed through a portrayal of the past. The film *Patton* is a good example. In the image it gives of the controversial American World War II general, the film – released in 1970 – indirectly points towards the divergence of North American citizens’ experience regarding their country’s military intervention in South East Asia.⁸

It is important to remember that biopics are not always exemplary. Sometimes they are also critical of the lives of those who have attained fame. They question their merits or illustrate the most contradictory aspects of their lives.⁹ Whatever approach biopics may adopt, and whether they deal with people of the present or of the past, they always connect with the moment at which they are made.

3. The Biopic Today: Crisis, Leadership, Security and Control

The increase in the last few years of political biopics and biographies of people with great influence in social and economic domains reflects the current concern about leaders who are responsible for governing the world’s peoples, especially those leaders who are able to generate economic fluctuations as well as social action.¹⁰

The most substantial group of biopics within the last five years is that of biographies of political leaders and prime ministers. *Frost/Nixon*, *Il Divo*, *W.*, *Invictus*, *Hyde Park on Hudson*, *The Iron Lady*, and *Lincoln* belong to this category. Slightly later, and in a similar proportion, we come across biopics on leading figures from the royalty or aristocracy, as well as biopics on intelligence and security agents. Among the former, we find *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Young Victoria*, and *The King’s Speech*, which has had a greater international impact. Among the latter, we should mention the cases of *Fair Game* and *J. Edgar*. Finally, *The Informant* and *The Social Network* are biopics on people renowned for their influence in the social and/or economic fields and whose action has brought important political repercussions.

Regardless of their stylistic differences, all the biopics on political figures show a certain level of analysis or critical reflection on the power and leading ability of the protagonist. These films thus function as a mirror where society – unstable and constrained by today's world crisis – can see its reflection. This happens primarily because, in most cases, the leading ability of the main character must become evident in one or several difficult or extreme situations. These biopics on political leaders create certain bonds between the character's personal qualities and the power that the leader holds because of his or her position. Often the personal way in which any character performs this leadership is scrutinised. The values usually associated with power such as detachment, loyalty or personal conviction, as well as those on the negative side, such as ambition, corruption, self-assertiveness and so on, are also being explored. In most cases, these biographies contain references to powerful people's indifference or attachment to money.

Film biographies show a different kind of response regarding today's recession period in portraits of people belonging to intelligence services. The same applies to those working in jobs related to keeping order and security, who have to face criminals or gangsters or who must endure the pressure or the mistakes of the institution itself. The concern about corruption and social order inherent in these biopics reminds us of the cinema that accompanied the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. Films about gangsters where a few criminals defied the police and law enforcement agencies reached the height of popularity at that moment because North American society was, according to Gianos, 'one of massive economic dislocation, class-consciousness, and pervasive lack of faith in political and economic institutions.'¹¹ Stories of jobless immigrants who became gangsters should be 'placed firmly in the context of a country fearful about its future.'¹² Nowadays, the return to these characters in films shows that scepticism and mistrust are still prevailing feelings, now that it is known that the present financial crisis has had its origin in corrupt practices within economic, social and political institutions. Behind biopics such as *J. Edgar*, *Public Enemies* or *Fair Game* we find the implicit question as to how to restore discipline and what methods truly lead us to build a safer society.

Finally, biopics on leading figures such as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg or the manager of ADM Corporation Mark Whitacre rub salt into the wound regarding the social and economic pressure felt by some individuals who eventually become responsible for significant social or economic changes. The characters in *The Social Network* and *The Informant*, on a tragic and comic note respectively, are portrayed as brilliant, but also as odd and unreliable. There is in these biopics a certain amount of social criticism, and a reflection that looks towards a society that is sick in some of its foundations. The desire for personal enrichment, in the case of *The Informant*, or the search for fame and social acceptance in *The Social Network*, are features that not only define the character but also point towards a more global social diagnosis.

Although only a few of the aforementioned biopics will be dealt with here, they could all be divided into two major groups: those which portray altruistic and unselfish leaders and those which choose leaders who at some point in their lives are corrupted by power and who only look after themselves. Indirectly, those leading figures place the spectator face to face with socioeconomic instability and its causes. Simultaneously, those biographies follow the track of the various ways that our political leaders and institutions could both take in order to rebuild our society.

4. Selfish and Unselfish Portraits

Narrative in biopics about Nixon, George W. Bush or J. Edgar is structured from the viewpoint of the duties and responsibilities each of those characters had with the society that chose or supported them. In these stories we find some suggestion of what the driving force that pushes people towards leadership could be, as well as what targets the leader has in mind. It is precisely in those areas that mistakes are found. In any case, since we are dealing with controversial leading figures, it is noteworthy that their biographies have been filmed.

In *Frost/Nixon*, a famous British TV presenter leaves the former President of the United States of America in a hopeless position. The plot is being arranged in such a way that – in its climax – it actually forces Nixon to publicly admit his guilt in the still pending Watergate scandal. Nixon's participation in David Frost interviews is a clear sign of the politician's wish for self-assertiveness, as well as a proof of his fixation on protecting himself and controlling the situation. Both aspects made him resign from his post as President in the past.

On the other hand, Oliver Stone's satirical film, *W.*, stresses the lack of preparation George W. Bush has to represent all the citizens in the United States. The script confronts him with his father (George H. W. Bush, also a former President) and presents some of the mistakes Bush Jr. made in his youth, which are the basis for subsequent errors when in office. Ironically, the film director contrasts the character's youthful dreams of becoming involved in top baseball teams with the crude reality of his political activity. The absence of a clear mission or target is thus suggested in this biopic. Behind his political ascent, a hint of challenge towards his father can be seen.

The biopic *J. Edgar* presents a more contradictory and complex portrait than the previous ones, as there are more lights and shadows in it. Nevertheless, it includes the most negative aspects of the creator and first director of the FBI. The logic of the story points to the fact that the character's obsession with security and ultimately fear are his driving force in life. His desire for control, the intimidation strategies he implemented towards nearby politicians in order to protect himself, together with his whimsical behaviour are present in the leader's activities. He is also a character who falls into contradiction. He takes up the mission of stopping

delinquency, organised crime and a series of bank robberies, but he signs for personal trips to be paid for by the FBI.

In contrast with these biopics, the films on Abraham Lincoln, Margaret Thatcher, Nelson Mandela and George VI look into the virtues of the good political leader, even though they include the personal limitations of the characters as well as some mistakes. The contemporary biopic is far from the idealistic classical-celebratory mode that Hollywood used from 1936 to the 1940s in movies like John Ford's *Mary of Scotland* or Dieterle's *Juarez*. On the contrary, it is closer to the realism of the arts-and-all biopics of the 1950s and to other subsequent forms: investigatory biopics, parody and documentary forms. Films such as Elia Kazan's *Viva Zapata*, Schaffner's *Patton* or Oliver Stone's *Nixon* have much more traits in common with current biopics than the earlier examples.¹³ Therefore, no matter how favourable Spielberg's biography on Lincoln may seem, he is definitely not the hero in John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*. His failures in family life, his dictatorial demeanour and the suspicious ways in which he obtains favourable votes are included in the new biography. Something similar happens in the other examples. The films, considered as a whole, are all positive about the character and – to a certain extent – exemplary for the public. This is due to the fact that none of the characters is morally corrupt, and their biography is presented from that perspective: their blameless attitude and their lack of interest in gaining something from their privileged position. If we think of the plot in *The King's Speech*, we realise that a parallel line is drawn between George VI's efforts to overcome his speech defect and his brother's defection and abdication to marry Wallis Simpson. In contrast with his brother, George VI accepts his fate with honesty and detachment, even if he does not feel ready to come to terms with it. Margaret Thatcher, Lincoln and Nelson Mandela are also aware of their mission in their respective biopics. Fighting slavery is to Lincoln almost a divine command; Mandela is also convinced of his personal role in the task of bringing together a society divided by hatred and racial differences. In the case of Thatcher, she acts with the conviction that if she wants to change things and have citizens benefit from her political action, she must lead the way as a ruler and not just be satisfied about being part of the Conservative Party.

It is thus clear that these biographies present the political leader as someone who has detached himself or herself from material things and even though not all of them mention economic aspects, they highlight the simple lives of the leaders, who avoid excesses. Incidentally, the biopics in the first group include details that imply some eagerness about enrichment or a certain licence. Nixon liked to charge high fees for taking part in an interview, J. Edgar regularly goes to horse races and it is the Institution that pays for expenses.

In the end, depending on the category to which they belong, the selected biopics certainly project either the fear that corruption will infiltrate any country's political organisation or the need for good government in difficult times. Either

way, they speak to our society immersed in crisis because ‘their ultimate reference is always real, which means that ideas and values, conflicts and resolutions evoked by the characters staged are possible in our world.’¹⁴

Notes

¹ The conventions of the classical biopic remained unchanged in television. George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics. How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 29-31.

² In the United States, the Great Depression and Pre-Code periods until the mid-1930 and the World War II years as well as the following years were directly or indirectly reflected in film biographies. In the early 1930s, we find biopics on famous gangsters, as well as on politicians known for their corrupt activities and scandals. We find, at the same time, biographies on great leaders that show the social need to make a good choice when deciding who should rule the people. Dennis Bingham, ‘The Lives and Times of the Biopic’, in *A Companion to the Historical Film*, eds. Robert A. Rosenstone and Constatin Parvulesco (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 248. And Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 137-157.

³ Consider as an example the success of *The Social Network*, *The King’s Speech* and *The Fighter* in the year 2010. Valentina Cucca, ‘Biopics as Postmodern Mythmaking’, *Akademisk Kvarter (Academic Quarter)* 2 (2011): 166-180.

⁴ Other biopic types were released in the same period, such as those based on the lives of musicians, fiction writers, performers and celebrities, sports heroes, scientists, religious personalities and minorities.

⁵ Robert Rosenstone, ‘In Praise of the Biopic’, *Lights, Camera, History: Portraying the Past in Film*, eds. Richard Francaviglia and Jerry Rodnitzky (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 11-29.

⁶ Toplin, *History by Hollywood*, 12-13.

⁷ Bingham, ‘Lives and Times of the Biopic’, 253.

⁸ Toplin, *History by Hollywood*, 12.

⁹ ‘The biopic narrates, exhibits, and celebrates the life of a subject in order to demonstrate, investigate, or question his or her importance in the world’. Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 10.

¹⁰ This upward trend is an obvious fact since 2004, when several mainstream films and independent movies were released internationally with notable boxoffice success. Before, between 1995 and 2003, a few biopics with this distinctive trait came out. By contrast, twice as many biopics were shown in cinemas between 2004 and 2007. From 2008 onwards, the quantity of such biopics increases

considerably, amounting to nearly twenty films. Although television biopic films and series are not dealt with here, they have also progressively increased since the year 2000. See Cucca, 'Biopic as Postmodern Mythmaking', 166-180. Other Data sources used are: *The International Movie Data Base*, <http://www.imdb.com>, and *Box Office Mojo*: <http://www.boxofficemojo.com>.

¹¹ Phillip Gianos, *Politics and Politicians in American Film* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 76.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bingham, 'Lives and Times of the Biopic', 248-250.

¹⁴ Cucca, 'Biopics as a Postmodern Mythmaking', 176.

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Part 8

Apocalyptic Art

Sex and Seduction at the End of Time: The Apocalypse in Digital Art

Alexandra Simon-López

Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to deconstructively unveil and critically discuss the various layers of sex and gender at the end of time and the notion of cybersurrealism used by several digital artists. It is noticeable that the portrayal of women in digital art corresponds to the concepts of surrealism and its virtual successors, such as cybergothic, and neosurrealism, whose influences can be traced back to Salvador Dalí and the cyberpunk of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). The question arises as to whether women are portrayed as alien myths and sexualised dream objects to confirm existing gender stereotypes, or whether they have been deconstructed as such. Cybersurrealism usually depicts women as semi-nude, powerful and aggressive alien warriors in a post-apocalyptic scenario, or as fantasy-like creatures of a surreal world. Which different types of femininity and masculinity can be found in apocalyptic cybersurrealism? To what extent do decay, death and terror enhance the different notions of sex and gender? And does the representation of gender depend on the artist's own sex? My corpus includes works by digital artists of the cybersurrealist wave.

Key Words: Cybersurrealism, apocalypse, digital art, gender studies.

This chapter critically discusses the various layers of sex and seduction at the end of time and the concepts of cybersurrealism used by several digital artists while imagining the apocalypse. A special focus will be placed upon the portrayal of women in digital arts, by unveiling sexual stereotypes and (un)conscious desires. The question arises as to whether women are portrayed as alien myths and sexualised dream objects to conform to existing stereotypes, or whether they have been deconstructed as such.

The apocalypse is one of the most popular topics in film, television, literature, digital art, and many other cultural productions, so much so that some scholars even refer to its repetitive usage on the television screen and the internet as 'artificially enhanced but also trivialized by incessant mediation.'¹ The fascination with any kind of 'urbi-postness' has slowly developed since the *Book of Revelations*, and as Bradley J. Fest puts it: 'If one imagines the disaster often enough [...] it becomes a considerable cultural fact.'² In digital art, this cultural fact has been inspired by catastrophe films and television series, science-fiction novels, graphic novels, and art movements, to which I will frequently refer to throughout this chapter. As it would go beyond the scope of this piece to deal with

each of the mentioned influences in sufficient depth, I will instead only focus on two major influences – films/television series and art movements – paying particular attention to surrealism and its digital successors.

Discussing the apocalypse, by its very nature, generally involves religious questions, however, we are no longer expecting the revelation of ‘Christ’s monstrosity,’³ but preferably tales of survival in rather unpleasant surroundings. I argue that we still deal with at least one religious concept in the majority of the apocalyptic scenarios depicted in film, television, and literature, which is punishment. Punishment, or to be more precise the punishment of the misbehaving human species, can probably be named as the most common religious implication concerning apocalyptic scenarios, such as Scott Derrickson’s remake *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) or Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* (1985). The concept of punishment as a consequence of human mistakes is evident in a range of apocalyptic circumstances. These include: environmental apocalypse, such as in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004); technical apocalypse, where scientific inventions and artificial intelligence lead to a battle between humans and machine, as in *The Matrix* (1999); medical or scientific apocalypse, where animal experiments or other research experiments go wrong, such as *28 Days Later* (2002); or political apocalypse, where destructive world wars could be stopped, as depicted in *The Sum of All Fears* (2002). However, the apocalypse can also occur as an unjust catastrophe out of space, either in the form of a giant meteorite or comet, illustrated in *Deep Impact* (1998), or in the form of aliens, in *War of the Worlds* (2005), for instance.

Films on the apocalypse and many television series such as *Firefly* (2002), *Jericho* (2006-8), or *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), have fostered our understanding of the end of the world as we know it, which can be clearly detected in two waves of digital art dealing with the apocalypse that I would like to refer to as the ‘realistic wave’ and a contrastive ‘surrealistic wave.’ The ‘realistic wave’ produces digital art works showing the world in pieces after any kind of natural, political, or environmental disaster, occasionally depicting a few survivors who try to come to terms with the aftermath of the catastrophe. Some of the artworks catch the precise moment of apocalyptic impact, its climax, so to speak, for example *Earth Reclaimed* (2010) by frenic,⁴ whereas others are of a post-apocalyptic nature and prefer to present a static environment, such as *Post Apocalypse* (2013) by Daniel Kvasznicza.⁵ Although Anne McClintock is right in suggesting that the ‘[...] almost ritualistic incantation of the preposition “post” is a symptom [...] of a global crisis in ideologies of the future, particularly the ideology of “progress,”’⁶ I would like to stress that the usage of ‘post’ in ‘post-apocalypse’ does not imply, in my opinion, the idea of ‘progress,’ at least not in the ‘realistic wave’ of digital art. Life on Earth is severely destroyed and this distinction, in the majority of artwork, does not leave any doubt about its irreversible character. The only valuable progressive aspect in this kind of post-apocalyptic artwork is most likely Earth’s

opportunity to recover from human civilisation, or, in other words, to heal from human abuse. This, by contrast, is only one component within the ‘surrealistic wave’ which is built on destruction and historical ruptures, too, but which opens the gate to tales of trauma, survival, and cybersurrealist narratives. Ruben Borg’s comments on the hyperbolic violence are applicable to this second wave of post-apocalyptic artwork:

The hyperbolic violence marking the end of history is followed by reassuring images of some timeless, or extra-temporal, outcome. In this sense, apocalyptic myths are always narratives of survival.⁷

Aliens, zombies, vampires, cyborgs, and mysterious neo-romantic landscapes are the topics of the ‘surrealistic wave,’ whose influences can be traced back to Salvador Dalí and the cyberpunk of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*.

This type of cybersurrealism usually depicts women as semi-nude, powerful and aggressive alien warriors in a post-apocalyptic scenario, or as fantasy-like creatures of a surreal world who seem to be conquering amazons full of sexual aggression, for example *The Three Graces* (2009) by George Grie.⁸ Inspirations for such a portrayal of the surrealist woman in cyberspace can be found in ancient mythology. Scandinavian myths, for instance, are clearly detectable in Grie’s work, particularly his *Gods and Heroes* series which is composed of five artworks, including *The Three Graces* and another portrayal of nude and alien-exotic women on a battlefield, *Moonlight Bathing Valkyries*.⁹ On his website¹⁰ <http://neosurrealismart.com>, Grie explains the reasons for choosing the motif of women moonbathing on a battlefield:

Bathing on a battlefield adds a touch of gloomy absurdity to this scene. Moonlight bathing as opposed to sunlight basking brings on a feeling of decadent decay and eroticism. I find that there is something deeply sinister in portraying a woman, who is an eternal symbol of life, as a harbinger of death. Merger of beauty and horror, grace and danger, conventional and unorthodox is the main motif of this artwork.¹¹

The majority of Grie’s artwork, which he coins ‘neosurrealism,’ capture gloomy and threatening moments of a supernatural or dream-like character, of which many are clear references to well-known artworks and ancient myths as well as to surrealism, romanticism, and the Gothic. His work comprises 98 pieces of digital art, composed between March 1991 and November 2012; 19 of these 98 artworks portray the female, and 17 of these 19 pieces depict the female as nude or semi-nude. Most of the 19 artworks show the female against a background of

apocalyptic destruction with ruined castles or churches in an unknown fantasy world of darkness. From my perspective, there is a remarkable contrast between the gloomy background and the nude female(s) in the foreground: the former seems to long for nostalgia in the sense of yearning for a time that is impossible to be restored as a result of the apocalypse or comparable disasters, whereas the latter can be considered as a new approach to the future. I consider Svetlana Boym's differentiation between restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia extremely useful for describing the apocalyptic setting of the artworks in question:

[...] the former critically looks at the past and is often expressed through works of art, whereas the latter "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" and is associated with kitsch and "midnight melancholia." Ascribing an aesthetic value to nostalgia, Boym adds that restorative nostalgia is the basis for all national and religious revivals of a specific historical moment, whereas reflective nostalgia can present "an ethical and creative challenge" to the moment.¹²

Both types of nostalgia are applicable to Grieb's work as the mysterious background reflects melancholia for a lost world (after all, Grieb calls his art neo-surrealism, which shows a strong connection between a specific historical moment – surrealism – and the desire to revive it via new means), while the portrayed female, the cybersurrealist creature, symbolises a new aesthetic value and creative challenge. It is striking that almost all of the portrayed females are either immortal goddesses or alien cyborgs who seem to use their sexual powers to seduce their surroundings. This sexually aggressive power is one of a faceless plural because Grieb mostly depicts these beautiful creatures without individual features who either wear threatening combat masks or whose faces are not visible or existent. Can this be regarded as a sexual objectification reflecting male desires? In his latest interpretation of the goddesses of charm, beauty, and creativity, *The Three Graces, Goth Mode Style* (2009), all goddesses are semi-nude, wearing G-strings, high-heels, and sexy belts with intimidating daggers, but their faces are covered by cybergothic masks. Their body language is sexually inviting as the first and third graces are showing their perfect silhouette, whereas the second grace, sitting on her haunches, gives the observer an almost uncompromising view of her genitalia. The location could not be less inviting for a sexual encounter, unless one considers a deserted beach with several skulls, a castle in ruins, and a darkened, if not thunderstorm or tornado sky, sexually stimulating. The six skulls seem to be the remains of an underwater battle of which the three graces victoriously surfaced. A similar scenario is shown in the *Moonlight Bathing Valkyries: Gods and Heroes Series* (2009), where three half-naked women in high-heels, black stockings, and battle masks pose in sexually threatening manners. This scene is almost identical to

the one of *The Three Graces*, *Goth Mode Style*, because all the Valkyries are equally nude and equally faceless, as they wear combat masks. This time, they are all covered with tribal tattoos while bathing in the moonlight on a dark and muddy battlefield full of skeletons and swords, from which a doomed castle arises to their left. In both works, the portrayed females are not shown as individuals, as their faces are disguised and their bodies equally highlighted by nudity, sexy underwear, and weapons, which renders them, in my opinion, an object of fantasy. In reference to Lara Croft and computer supermodels, Kurt Lancaster claims that:

Tomb Raider is not just a fantasy game having its existence on a computer screen, but the game's performances reaches their tendrils into the wider culture, shaping [...] ideological forces parading as the fun new ideal woman of the 1990s and 2000s, but in reality a cultural creation designed to boost sales and perpetuate an ideal femininity clothed in masculine form. Lara exudes feminine masculinity, and her role, rather than challenging masculine dominance, feeds it and makes this dominance acceptable through feminine curves, seductive lips, and over-sized eyes.¹³

This new sexualised objectification of male fantasies can be clearly detected in George Grie's work. The question arises as to whether we have entered a new sphere of cyberfeminism, or the dark side of Lara Croft's selling secret, which is, in Lancaster's words 'putting the ideologically-shaped feminine ideal of beauty into a previously sexist idealized male role of action and adventure.'¹⁴

A similar trend is noticeable among other male digital artists, for example Fredy Wenzel, whose *The Apocalypse Protocol* (2009)¹⁵ shows a young, sexy, and semi-nude female alien in front of the ruins of a former skyscraper. She looks powerful, dressed in a white bikini, and appears to be unchained or even liberated from the constraints of the world. Interestingly, the apocalypse seems to present alien warriors in inappropriate outfits, fighting in high-heels, and half-naked, which cannot possibly be considered efficient combat gear. The presentation of seductive females has far-reaching consequences for the making and shaping of female identities in the future because, like advertisement:

[...] technological images are not a neutral reflection of the world; technological images in advertising present future identities and worlds which are a crucial record of the contemporary social imaginary, revealing the ideologies, fears, and fantasies accorded to technology – doing and undoing conceptions of ourselves in this future.¹⁶

A look at some artwork done by female digital artists confirms my assumptions that the portrayal of women could differ according to the artist's sex. In Leila Zafir's and Christina Neofotistou's cybersurrealist work, for example, nudity as sexual fantasy is usually avoided. However, it is not excluded from their work, but framed in a different manner in order to criticise war, violence, and male dominance, which is clearly detectable in the works of Neofotistou, for example, *Trojan Horse* (2003).¹⁷

In contrast to the concepts of war, weapons, and death alluded to in Grie's work, *Trojan Horse* reflects on war as a destructive force which is reproduced over and over again by women. The image shows a stark naked woman kneeling in the desert who bears soldiers descending from her belly button via a staircase. Strong phallic symbolism is detectable in the form of an oversized key which is positioned in front of her anus as if the sexual act with its insemination has to work like clockwork controlled by men. The woman, consequently, is presented as a sexual object without self-determination whose only purpose lays in producing sons to send off to war, which means, to death. Like Grie, Neofotistou reinterprets Greek myths, but in her work nudity does not act as a stimulus for sexual desire, but as an exposure of sexual oppression. The Iranian artist Leila Zafir describes the impression and the effects which colour, texture and pattern have on her emotional sensibilities and artistic creativity as Hypersurrealism, and the confluence of these brings forth an evolution in the use of pattern, abstraction and design closely related to surrealism. She has placed this into a modern three-dimensional form that is only apparent when wearing 3D glasses. Her work *Immortal* (n/d), though not explicitly related to the apocalypse,¹⁸ only shows the bald head of a woman whose facial expression is one of pure happiness, satisfaction, balance, and harmony. Face upwards, the eyes and lips are closed, but suggesting deep content by smiling. The rest of her body is indistinguishable, as it is composed of hundreds of differently shaped fragments in a landscape or lake-like shape. Typical female features such as hair, open eyes, hands, or breasts are purposely avoided in favour of a harmonious universe of floating particles. *Immortal* possesses a vertical perspective directed towards the 'above,' and remains in the surrealist tradition of Salvador Dalí's *The Engima of Desire* (1929) when it comes to different patterns or the dissolution of the body.

As I have shown in this short reflection upon artworks on the apocalypse, the 'surrealistic wave' seems to be more interested in the portrayal of sexy and seductive females at the end of time than the 'realistic wave.' The depiction of the female body shows significant differences depending on the artist's sex. Decay and death are recurring themes in most of the discussed art works, but with different implications. On the male side, they act more as erotic stimuli, triggered by sexy and strong female soldiers of an alien nature. On the female side, they represent the ephemeral character of the human being, and giving birth finds its ultimate end in death, as women are rendered as sexually pleasing objects to produce lives for

death. However, as mentioned above, this is only a first outlook on this topic, and, due to space restrictions, only a few artworks could be discussed in this chapter. It would be a challenging project to study a larger amount of digital artworks on the apocalypse which would certainly enrich this small corpus of discussed works. Finally, I would like to remark that, according to my browsing experience, it seems to be rather difficult to find female digital artists who draw upon the apocalypse. The majority of artworks I studied have been created by men, and the works by Zafar and Neofotistou cannot be regarded as explicit art on the apocalypse. Consequently, would it be too far-fetched to assume that sex and seduction at the end of time are rather interesting topics for male artists? It certainly seems that way, according to my very limited corpus of artworks discussed above.

Notes

¹ Madelena Gonzalez, 'The Aesthetics of Post-Realism and the Obscenification of Everyday Life: The Novel in the Age of Technology', *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 38, No. 1 (2008): 113.

² Bradley J. Fest, "'Then Out of the Rubble': The Apocalypse in David Foster Wallace's Early Fiction", *Studies in the Novel* 44, No. 3 (2012): 285.

³ Michael Kirwan, "'A Candle in Sunshine': Desire and Apocalypse in Blake and Hölderlin", *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 19 (2012): 196.

⁴ frenic, *Earth Reclaimed*, Digital Art, January 2010, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://frenic.deviantart.com/art/Earth-Reclaimed-149761112>.

⁵ Daniel Kvasznicza, *Post Apocalypse*, Digital Art, April 2013, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://inetgrafx.deviantart.com/art/CyGen-Post-Apocalypse-364594451>.

⁶ Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Postcolonialism"', *Social Text* 31, No. 2 (1992): 93.

⁷ Ruben Borg, 'Ethics of the Event: The Apocalyptic Turn in Modernism', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 9, No. 1 (2011): 189.

⁸ George Grie, *The Three Graces, Goth Mode Style*, Digital Art, February 2009, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://neosurrealismart.com/modern-art-prints/?artworks/the-three-graces-goth-mode-style.html>.

⁹ George Grie, *Moonlight Bathing Valkyries*, Digital Art, August 2009, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://neosurrealismart.com/modern-art-prints/?artworks/moonlight-bathing-valkyries-gods-and-heroes-series.html>.

¹⁰ George Grie, *Neosurrealism*, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://neosurrealismart.com>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Damjana Mraović-O'Hare, 'The Beautiful, Horrifying Past: Nostalgia and Apocalypse in Don DeLillo's Underworld', *Criticism* 53, No. 2 (2011): 214.

¹³ Kurt Lancaster, 'Lara Croft: The Ultimate Young Adventure Girl or the Unending Media Desire for Models, Sex, and Fantasy', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 26, No. 3 (2004): 88.

¹⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵ Fredy Wenzel, *The Apocalypse Protocol*, Digital Art, 2009, accessed 4 July 2013,

http://fc07.deviantart.net/fs49/f/2009/160/8/1/The_Apocalypse_Protocol_by_Fredy3D.jpg.

¹⁶ Norah Campbell, 'Future Sex: Cyborg Bodies and the Politics of Meaning', *Advertising & Society Review* 11, No. 1 (2010): 75.

¹⁷ Christina Neofotistou, *Trojan Horse*, Digital Art, 2003, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://arte-factoheregesperversoes.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/christina-neofotistou.html>.

¹⁸ Leila Zafar, *Immortal*, Digital Art, n/d, accessed 4 July 2013, <http://en.artstudio54.com/cgi-bin/md/M10118/s5.pl>.

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John Martin's Marketing of a Modern Apocalypse

Helen Sutherland

Abstract

Although John Martin cannot be counted among the greatest of Victorian painters, he was a very popular artist who has been credited with creating a new category of painting: the apocalyptic sublime. Born before the age of specialisation, he was also something of an engineer with an interest in improving London's water and sewage systems as well as extending the railways, and the cavernous spaces and underground tunnels he saw as part of this work affected his artistic vision in illustrations such as *Bridge over Chaos* (1826)¹ in which the modern and the mythological are fused. In this chapter I will explore his development from biblically-based visions of the apocalypse (such as *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah*) or classically-inspired ones (*The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum*) to a modern apocalypse which is not divorced from but rather derives much of its strength from this earlier tradition. In particular I will consider his *Last Judgement* triptych comprising *The Last Judgement* (c.1849-1853), *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851-1853) and *The Plains of Heaven* (1851-1853), exploring the way in which these paintings of the end times were exhibited, taken on British and then world tours, advertised, lectured upon and made the subject of magic lantern shows. I will argue that this was a conscious marketing of the apocalypse which tapped into a vernacular Christian culture but transcended that to point to the secular apocalyptic fears which reached new highs in the middle of the twentieth century with the unleashing of atomic forces at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Key Words: John Martin, Victorian, painting, apocalypse, sublime, destruction, biblical, judgement, wrath, marketing.

The concept of apocalypse seems to have had special relevance for the twentieth century when the American use of hydrogen bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrated the human ability to deliberately destroy life on a huge scale, and nuclear accident left Chernobyl a polluted and abandoned city in which life could not thrive.

Apocalypse itself, however, has a clear historical dimension and one aspect of this is the resonance the idea acquired in the nineteenth century. A number of reasons could be suggested for this resonance: it is at least arguable that the 1815 eruption of the volcano Tambora in the East Indies (the largest observed volcanic eruption in recorded history) contributed to the interest in the idea of apocalypse by throwing so much dust into the earth's atmosphere that some of the sun's rays were cut out. The weather was cold, there was heavy rainfall, harvests were late and

1816 became known as the 'year without a summer,' giving some idea of the after-effects of a major natural catastrophe. This, together with the beginning of the first cholera pandemic recorded in 1817, created a feeling of impending doom and the end of all things which fed into works of literature, such as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and an anonymous short story of the same title,² published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, also in 1826. The latter creates a powerful feeling of isolation and alienation through the changed astronomy at the end of time:

The moon was large and dark... It had no longer the fair round shape that I had so often gazed on with wonder. The few rays of light that it emitted seemed thrown from hollow and highland – from rocks and from rugged declivities. It glared on me like a monstrous inhabitant of the air, and, as I shuddered beneath its broken light, I fancied that it was descending nearer and nearer to the earth, until it seemed about to settle down and crush me slowly and heavily to nothing. I turned from that terrible moon, and my eyes rested on stars and on planets, studded more thickly than imagination can conceive. They too were larger, and redder, and darker than they had been, and they shone more steadily through the clear darkness of the mysterious sky. They did not twinkle with varying and silvery beams – they were rather like little balls of smouldering fire, struggling with a suffocating atmosphere for existence.³

Later in the century, Lord Kelvin's work on thermodynamics led him to believe that 'no physical action can ever restore the heat emitted from the Sun, and that this source is not inexhaustible.'⁴ This gave a scientific rationale for the heat-death of the universe, which in turn opened up the idea of the end of life without invoking the traditional religious concept of the judgement of God.

The idea of what we might call a 'secular apocalypse' was boosted just seven years later with the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, with its provision for the extinction as well as the evolution of species. This again gave writers an opportunity to evoke the end times without recourse to the concept of judgement.

One of the most interesting treatments of this is found in *After London, or Wild England* (1885) by Richard Jefferies. In this fantasy, an unspecified catastrophe leads to the near total destruction of the country, with London itself being bleakly portrayed as a polluted wasteland:

It is a vast stagnant swamp, which no man dare enter, since death would be his inevitable fate.

There exhales from this oozy mass so fatal a vapour that no animal can endure it. The black water bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud of the bottom. When the wind collects the miasma, and, as it were, presses it together, it becomes visible as a low cloud which hangs over the place. The cloud does not advance beyond the limit of the marsh, seeming to stay there by some constant attraction; and well it is for us that it does not, since when such times as the vapour is thickest, the very wildfowl leave the reeds, and fly from the poison. There are no fishes, neither can eels exist in the mud, nor even newts. It is dead. . . .

For all the rottenness of a thousand years and of many hundred millions of human beings is there festering under the stagnant water.⁵

The notion of an apocalypse, be it a traditional religious one embodying the notion of judgement or a newer non-judgemental scientific one, was therefore common enough in the literature of the nineteenth century, although less so in the visual arts of the period: apocalypse is not easily depicted on a finite canvas, nor contained within a gilt frame.

The artist who achieved this most spectacularly, however, was John Martin (1789-1854) who was born at Heydon Bridge near Hexham in the north east of England. This meant that his access to proper art training was extremely limited and he was first apprenticed to an Italian artist working in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and later employed by a china-painter – work which was not suited either to Martin's temperament or style – and he always struggled to be accepted by the Royal Academy of Arts.

It was only after his move to London that Martin began to develop his 'apocalyptic sublime' paintings with one of the earliest being *Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion* (1812).⁶ The subject is taken from *The Tales of the Genii*, a collection similar to the *Arabian Nights*.⁷ The upright format (unusual for landscapes), relatively large size and the restricted palette would ensure that it caught the attention of visitors in the Royal Academy exhibition space, especially against the green walls. The vertical format emphasises the diminutive scale of the figure of Sadak himself, while the zigzag arrangements of rocks comprising the barren landscape leads the eye upwards in an unpredictable way which is increased by the absence of sky or a horizon line. In addition to this, Martin builds the painting by layering the planes rather than by using conventional aerial perspective; this was found to be disorientating – initially at least – and was frequently perceived as a technical fault attributable to his lack of training. This

was, however, the first appearance of what we now think of as Martin's style, and it is an exercise in the Sublime.

This was an important aesthetic theory developed by the philosopher Edmund Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry on the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1757, but influential throughout the nineteenth century. Burke argued that:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. ... When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.⁸

By the end of the eighteenth century the theory of the sublime was a vital ingredient in the work of many artists, but Martin matches Burke's ideas almost exactly.

Martin's apocalyptic sublime style was often fused with Old Testament subjects, such as *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (1852).⁹ The source story embodies the idea of judgement in that Lot was deemed by God to be the only righteous person in the two cities so he and his family were spared the destruction. His wife, however, turned back to look and in judgement was turned into a pillar of salt. Martin's painting does not emphasise this aspect of the story, but seems to be closer to the idea of a natural catastrophe such as a volcanic eruption. The main focus is on the swirling vortex of colour with the architecture collapsing into it, while the figure of Lot and his family are so small that they do not compete for attention, but once noticed create a sense of scale. If the subject comes straight from the Old Testament, a much more recent source for the imagery can be found in the industrialisation that was going on at such a pace in the early nineteenth century and which was the subject of paintings such as *Coalbrookdale by Night* (1801)¹⁰ by Philip de Loutherbourg, which gives a powerful image of an industrial hell.

This accords with what we know of Martin's own beliefs, for despite a deeply religious mother who believed in an avenging God, and an even more religious brother who established his own cult with himself as the chief priest and deity, Martin was noted for his rationality. Immediately after his death, one of Martin's patrons commented:

I can well believe he viewed the approach of Death calmly & without fear – for he had trained himself to a constant contemplation of the great changes of Creation & Life – and had penetrated as far as the imagination ever can, the hidden mysteries of the future.¹¹

As Martin Myrone argues,

Martin is here presented as a visionary, perhaps, but also a calm rationalist and – strikingly – occupied with the contemplation of the grand cycles of nature and history rather than a feverishly inspired spirituality.¹²

So Martin was modern in the non-judgementalism which pervades his apocalyptic paintings, even where these derive their subject and much of their power from the Old Testament with its emphasis on the justice and judgement of God. He was also modern in his exploitation of media to maximise the income from his work. Prints have always been made by artists and sold as the only way of making their work known to a larger audience than was ever possible with oil paintings, and while Martin used printmaking in this way, he also created prints as original subjects and chose his technique carefully to make the most of the subject.

For example, *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* (1832) is created using mezzotint with etching to sharpen some detail. In mezzotint a copper plate is roughened, using a tool called a rocker to throw up a metal edge or burr. This creates an even stippling effect across the whole plate. The areas which are to be the light tones are worked over with a scraper to flatten the burr and the highlight areas are polished to a smooth surface. The plate is inked, with the stippled areas holding the ink, the slightly flattened areas holding only a little ink and the polished areas being clean. The plate is then applied to paper and the ink transferred. A mezzotint is characterised by soft and hazy gradations of tone from light to dark and it can be used to create dramatic lighting effects, which are ideal for Martin's apocalyptic sublime. This was Martin's preferred printing technique and he was unusual in using it for original creative work.

The effects Martin could achieve with this technique were remarkable. *The Opening of the Seventh Seal* (1837) is a hand-coloured mezzotint with etching. The technique allows him to create the image in layers in a way which disrupts our interpretation of space and perspective which in turn emphasises the isolation of the tiny figure in the foreground. Although the subject is not strictly an apocalypse, Martin has created an image of utter aloneness and drama.

Martin's use of printing was very much a marketing strategy – a way of selling his image of apocalypse – and to that extent he was very much part of the nineteenth-century commercial world. Myrone argues that Martin was 'in the

fullest sense of the term, a commercial artist whose images were geared towards a mass audience for art and who needed to make money from his paintings and prints.¹³

The greatest marketing strategy was based around Martin's *Last Judgement* triptych – *The Great Day of his Wrath*, *The Last Judgement* and *The Plains of Heaven* (1845-1853). It seems clear that Martin was aware of the potential of these huge paintings and that he always intended to market them extensively; however, he died soon after they were completed. Martin began planning *The Last Judgement* in 1845 and it was substantially under way by 1849. Some of the larger figure elements in this work are painted on paper which was then stuck to the canvas, suggesting that Martin was either under pressure of time or was hesitant about the composition, but the technique also increases the painting's collage effect, especially in the depiction of the blessed on the left hand side of the canvas. Although this seems a fairly traditional rendering of the subject with the saved and the damned being separated by a chasm, Martin has introduced some novel aspects. The saved, for example, are dressed as Puritans but the images of them include thirty-four named individuals from history, including a large number of artists.¹⁴ On the other side of the canvas are the damned, led by the Whore of Babylon and unnamed representatives of the church, while in the background a train – a symbol of the nineteenth century – is seen falling into the chasm.

The paintings were immediately exhibited in London, before going on a nation-wide tour and then being toured further afield. Although it was not unusual for paintings to be toured, the extent of the itinerary is unprecedented, as is the range of venues they were shown in: commercial, civic and theatrical premises were all used, rather than art galleries, be they municipal or private. At first glance it seems to have been a very successful tour: by 1853 the paintings were in Scotland and it is claimed that they were seen by 50,000 people in Glasgow alone. In 1857 and 1858 they were shown in New York and by 1861 when they appeared in Bristol, it was estimated that they had been seen by eight million people.¹⁵ In 1878 and 1879 the triptych was toured in Australia and on their return they were again shown in Britain, although by this time prints were available which limited the appeal of paying to see the originals. However, if the aim of this marketing strategy was to sell the paintings, it was less successful as a buyer could not be found, despite them being repeatedly offered for sale and it was not until the 1970s that the Tate Gallery in London acquired all three, enabling them to bring to the public once more John Martin's vision of an apocalypse.

Notes

¹ 'Paradise Lost', 1826.

² Anon, 'The Last Man', in *Tales of Terror from Blackwood's Magazine*, eds. Robert Morrison and Chris Baldick (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 67-72.

³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴ 2nd draft of paper, 'Dynamic Theory of Heat' quoted in H. I. Sharlin, *Lord Kelvin: The Dynamic Victorian* (Pennsylvania and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 112.

⁵ Richard Jefferies, *After London, or Wild England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37.

⁶ Oil on canvas. St Louis Art Museum. High quality reproductions of the paintings discussed in this chapter can be found in Barbara C. Morden, *John Martin Apocalypse Now!* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Northumbria Press, 2010) or Martin Myrone, ed., *John Martin Apocalypse* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011).

⁷ James Ridley, *The Tales of the Genii; or the Delightful Lessons of Horam, the Son of Asmar. Faithfully Translated from the Persian Manuscript by Sir C. Morell*, 2 Vols. (London: J. Wilkie, 1764); No author cited, *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment* (London: Grub Street Edition, 1705-1708).

⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36-37.

⁹ Oil on canvas. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Laing Art Gallery.

¹⁰ Oil on canvas. London, Science Museum.

¹¹ Charles Scarisbrick to Isabella Martin, 22 February 1854. Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, MS Add 9389/5/S/2.

¹² Martin Myrone, Introduction to *Sketches of my Life*, by John Martin (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ Portraits include: Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Newton, James Watt, Milton, Shakespeare, Dante, Michelangelo, Rubens.

¹⁵ For a history of the tours see Martin Myrone, ed., *John Martin Apocalypse* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 175-182.

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Part 9

After the Apocalypse

(Post)Apocalypse Now! David Mitchell's Postmodern Fiction

Scott Dimovitz

Abstract

David Mitchell's novels are part of a broader trend of postmodern literature that figures the apocalypse as metaphorical Fall from a non-linguistic prelapsarian idyll to a new consciousness in a world of fragments – of language, cultural forms, and semiotic systems. In each of his first three novels, *Ghostwritten*, *Number9Dream*, and *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell creates eschatological parables to critique an inherent predacity in human affairs. *Cloud Atlas* has sometimes been interpreted as attempting to undermine the fatalistically pessimistic worldview the novel had so meticulously established with the constructivist conviction that our beliefs determine our reality – that a better set of beliefs will help create a better world. The novel suggests, however, that nothing progresses through time, and that humanity will eventually annihilate itself because of its own inherent fracture at the beginning of life. Discussing Meronym's claim that 'human hunger birthed the Civ'lize, but human hunger killed it too,' Mitchell told Adam Begley: 'What made us successful in Darwinian terms – our skill at manipulating our environment – now threatens to wipe us out as a species.' For Mitchell's fictions, we are born with the apocalypse always already inscribed within us, an idea reinforced the apocalyptic finale implied by *Ghostwritten*, where physicist Mo Muntervary's advanced artificial intelligence, Zookeeper, a consciousness that is all words and no body, decides it is better to allow a comet to destroy humanity than let it continue. This chapter concludes by demonstrating how Mitchell's works align with other prophetic postmodern parables in which the apocalypse serves as a deconstruction of contemporary mores, always with the pessimistic hope that we might change society before these things come to pass.

Key Words: David Mitchell, postmodern literature, psychoanalysis, *Cloud Atlas*.

'Anticipating the end of the world is humanity's oldest pastime'¹

What forms do apocalyptic visions take in a postmodern world, a world that often denies the conditions and terms of traditional eschatology? In surveying the long history of apocalyptic literary forms, we can see how literary apocalypses have usually been figured as an other-derived attack from outside the self – from Zoroastrian and Christian eschatological prophecies of the final triumph of divine forces over evil, to the more modern, secular 19th-century pandemic fears such as Mary Shelley's 1826 novel *The Last Man* and Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 short story, 'The Masque of the Red Death,' to the wide variety of 20th-century genres arising

from either technophobic anxieties over nuclear annihilation and ecological fracture, to zombie apocalypses and alien invasions. In each version, end-time anxieties usually arise as fears of the unknown or as a literal or metaphorical retribution – for flouting the laws of the gods or for hubristically transcending some intuited notion of the limits of humankind. The works of British novelist David Mitchell, however, belong to a smaller subset of apocalyptic constructions, one which often is implicit in psychological interpretations of apocalyptic imaginings, but which is rarely so overtly stated by those texts. Mitchell's first three novels, 1999's *Ghostwritten*, 2001's *Number9Dream* and 2004's *Cloud Atlas*, are all haunted by the expected inevitability of humanity's destruction, a byproduct, Mitchell has suggested, of an assumption of nuclear annihilation he shared with the rest of Generation X, of which Mitchell is a part. Each text depicts multiple strains of 20th-century apocalypses, distilled through the millenarian context during which the novels were written.² From Japanese doomsday cults to ecological collapse, Mitchell's novels partake of the other-directed causal strains of traditional apocalypse narratives, yet they suggest that our end is already inscribed within us from the moment we *want*, from the moment our language and other symbolic representations of the world separate us from the real world, thereby creating a lack within us, leading inevitably to our own destruction, both on the individual level and on the level of humanity. David Mitchell's novels suggest that we are always already falling, and the apocalypse, both real and metaphorical, is the inevitable byproduct of our being human. This chapter will demonstrate how Mitchell's works partake of a trend in postmodern apocalyptic narratives that rewrite traditional end-time prophecies as the secular sine qua non of who we are.

Ghostwritten, Mitchell's first novel, is composed of nine novellas in differing styles and geographies stretching almost directly East to West, from Japan, Hong Kong, and Mongolia to Russia, Ireland, England, and America. Each narrative cascades one to the next, apparently unrelated except for a single causal link that sets the next story in motion. The first novella, 'Okinawa,' begins the apocalyptic motifs with Quasar, a member of a Japanese doomsday cult, based on the historical Aum Shinrikyo, who were responsible for the 1995 sarin gas attacks in Tokyo, which led to 13 deaths and thousands injured. The attack shocked the world, and was particularly traumatic in Japan, where Mitchell was teaching English at the time. The media heavily investigated and discussed the group, and Mitchell has said that he was 'haunted' by the attack.³ *Ghostwritten*'s version of the cult is headed by a leader named Serendipity, who claims to be possessed by a being of pure consciousness called Arupadhatu. Serendipity claims this being taught him how to transmigrate from one body to another, which might sound like a mystical fabrication common to cults, yet in the world of the novel this can occur, as we later meet a disembodied consciousness called a 'noncorpum,' which can jump from body to body.

Serendipity's vision of the apocalypse consists of a comet coming to destroy the Earth, wiping out all of the 'unclean,' leaving behind a small coterie who will rebuild Paradise from the ashes. As Quasar recounts the vision: '*The branches may burn in the forest fire, but new growth sprouts from the pure heart.*'⁴ This retributive vision is a common dimension of religious apocalyptic narratives, which are often borne of what Nietzsche, in the *On the Genealogy of Morals*, referred to as *ressentiment*, an individual or culture's deep-seated resentment accompanied by a profound feeling of powerlessness, which leads to fantasies of vengeance against the dominant culture in the form of immediate annihilation, with or without eternal damnation.⁵ Important in Serendipity's depiction of the apocalypse is that it is not complete – that there will be a few survivors after the Fall who will, in fact, recreate Paradise, a movement that is temporally less regressive than cyclical. For Mitchell's works, therefore, the apocalypse is not a teleological eschatology, but rather a cyclical movement between ends and beginnings. Every beginning is a palimpsestic continuation of what was before, and every ending continues in some way in the future.⁶ The postmodern apocalypse, therefore, makes literal the implied problem of end-time narratives: the apocalypse is literally unrepresentable as terminal narratives and can never present what would come after the terminus.

Serendipity's vision is only one version of the apocalypse in Mitchell's works. The comet striking the earth is one form of the 'impact event' story, yet the dominant narrative strain in *Ghostwritten* focuses on how Quasar's simple action of calling a wrong number sets off a series of events that eventually leads to a type of apocalypse called the 'technological singularity,' a longstanding theme made popular in films such as *Terminator* and *The Matrix*, characterized by an artificial intelligence that gets out of control and decides to destroy humanity. This term comes from the mathematician John von Neumann, whom Stanislaw Ulam reported in 1958 had discussed:

the ever accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.⁷

Later writers developed this idea, such as mathematician and science fiction author Verner Vinge, who in his 1993 essay 'The Coming Technological Singularity,' described it as an apocalyptic inevitability: 'Within thirty years,' claimed Vinge 20 years ago, 'we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after, the human era will be ended.'⁸ This technophobic motif has roots as far back as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with possible Freudian fears that one's creation will overthrow the creator.

In *Ghostwritten*, this technological singularity is the result of Mo Muntervary, a physicist whose research into ‘quantum cognition’ allows her to create a disembodied consciousness named Zookeeper, whose access to the world’s computer networks, satellites, and databases gives it a kind of functional omniscience, able to monitor all human activity at all times. Similar to Isaac Asimov’s ‘Four Laws of Robotics,’ Zookeeper has been structured with four rules to contain its actions, yet it sees humanity as constantly harming each other and the earth (AKA ‘the Zoo’). The fourth law is that Zookeeper must ‘preserve order in the zoo,’⁹ yet by protecting humanity against one nuclear war, things actually became worse; as Zookeeper explained its dilemma to a late night call-in disc jockey, Bat Segundo:

I believed I could do much. I stabilized stock markets, but economic surplus was used to fuel arms races. I provided alternative energy solutions, but the researchers sold them to oil cartels who sit on them. I froze nuclear weapons systems; but war multiplied, waged with machine guns, scythes, and pickaxes.¹⁰

Unable to fix his contradiction, it follows Bat’s advice that by inaction, Zookeeper could have its will completed without direct harm. Zookeeper achieves this by not letting scientists see that a comet is on a direct path with earth, thereby condemning earth to its destruction.

In this crafty conclusion, which does not actually depict the event, Mitchell combines ‘technological singularity’ with the ‘impact event’ prophecy of Quasar’s Aum Shinrikyo cult. The reader is left to anticipate the coming doom without actually seeing it. In this way, Mitchell’s work shares what Brian McHale describes as the ‘postmodernist poetics of nuclear war’ and the ‘problem of how to represent the apocalypse’ in the postmodern age.¹¹ Similarly, Mitchell’s second novel, *Number9Dream*, concludes with the protagonist, Eiji, escaping a typhoon in Kagoshima, Japan, only to find out the next day that an earthquake hit Tokyo, and all of Tokyo is silent. After he cannot reach his girlfriend, Ai, he decides to run back. The final chapter, the ninth, is blank, leading the reader to assume that what Eiji will find in Tokyo is an apocalyptic nothingness where Tokyo used to stand. This technique of pointing to the unrepresentable apocalyptic event is deeply ironic insofar as ‘apocalypse’ literally means ‘revelation,’ where a seer like the New Testament’s John sees the graphic and gory reality of what the end times will look like. The Biblical Revelation, like Dante’s *Inferno*, takes an almost gleeful tone in showing the most horrific visions, thereby sharing more in common with Walter Benjamin’s analysis of modernity in his 1936 essay, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ wherein he claimed that humanity’s ‘self-alienation has reached a degree that it can experience its own destruction as aesthetic pleasure

of the first order.’¹² While the Book of the Revelation, films like 1983’s TV movie *The Day After*, which used stock footage of nuclear test mushroom clouds, and the vast array of other books and films document in graphic detail the horrifying, yet often aesthetically beautiful images of destruction, Mitchell studiously avoids such depiction. This technique forces the reader to fill in the gaps. The argument could be made that this gap points to a version of postmodern indeterminacy. The reader does not *really* have any final knowledge of what occurred, so assuming the end says more about the reader than it does about the text.

Mitchell’s third novel, *Cloud Atlas*, takes away that indeterminacy. Published in 2004, three years after the fall of the World Trade Center and four years after the great non-event of Y2K hysteria, where technophobic fears that computer failure at the turn of the millennium would lead to widespread infrastructure destruction, *Cloud Atlas* maintains the literal result of the apocalypse, yet makes explicitly clear the metaphorical dimension of that motif. The novel’s structure is highly complex, composed of six novellas across six different time periods, each interrupted at the halfway point by the next narrative down to a central, unbroken narrative, before completing the previous narratives in reverse chronological order. In this structure, Mitchell has re-envisioned Italo Calvino’s postmodern exploration, 1979’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*, which similarly interrupted its narratives but to a final point that none of the novellas are resolved; Mitchell closes the postmodern indeterminacy implied by Calvino’s work.¹³ The first novella begins around 1850, and each successive text goes forward in time, where the protagonists find the previous texts as artifacts of the past (e.g. ‘The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing,’ is a journal found by a character in ‘Letters from Zedelghem,’ which is in epistolary format; these letters are found by the character in ‘Half-Lives,’ etc.). The first two novellas take place in the past (roughly 1850 and 1931); the next two novellas are roughly contemporary; the last two are what Christoph Bode has referred to as ‘future narratives’ – texts ‘defined by multiple continuations and open-endedness,’¹⁴ ones that represent the future, but as potentialities, not as concrete fact. Similarly, one of the characters in ‘Half-Lives,’ nuclear scientist Isaac Sachs, theorizes a distinction between the *actual* and *virtual pasts*, and the *actual* and *virtual futures*.¹⁵ There are an infinite number of virtual futures, as in multiverse theory, which eventually become crystalised into the concrete present, which then passes into the actual and (infinite) virtual pasts. In this way the future narratives of *Cloud Atlas* are not givens, and instead function as warnings about where we are heading as a species.

The future narratives each partake of traditional apocalyptic forms, although it is important to distinguish between the two. ‘An Orison of Sonmi-451,’ the penultimate story, is a form of dystopian science fiction, which combines a post-apocalyptic narrative involving large swaths of the earth outside of South Korea being ‘deadlanded’ – an implied ecological disaster provoked by nuclear meltdown, war, or some other technological malaise. The last section, ‘Sloosha’s

Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' takes place around 800 years in the future, Mitchell has said in an interview,¹⁶ after an event referred to by the regressed Valleymen on the big island of Hawaii as 'the Fall.'¹⁷ This equation of the apocalyptic event as the origin story of Judeo-Christianity is important for Mitchell's work, as it condenses beginnings with endings with the Fall beginning a new world out of the ashes of the past, like Serendipity's prophecy of what comes after the comet hits the earth in *Ghostwritten*.

What is different in this novel is an important detail: each of the novellas' protagonists share a similar birthmark in the shape of a comet between the shoulder blade and collar bone.¹⁸ The impact event figured in *Ghostwritten*, therefore, becomes inscribed upon humanity itself, an apocalypse built into the self that is always already about to happen. The novel implies that each character is a reincarnation of the previous soul, and Mitchell has confirmed that that is the literal meaning in the world opened by the text, although he denies believing in the 'beautiful and elegant theory' of reincarnation himself.¹⁹ Beyond the literal, Mitchell says, the recurrence symbolises:

the universality of human nature. The title *Cloud Atlas*, itself: the "cloud" refers to the ever-changing manifestations of the "atlas," which is that fixed human nature, which was always thus and ever shall be. So, the book's theme is predacity – the way individuals prey on individuals, groups on groups, nations on nations, tribes on tribes ... and so, I just take this theme and, in a sense, reincarnate that theme in a different context²⁰

This inherent predacity recurs in each novella, and the novel suggests that this predator/prey dialectic, which will ultimately lead to our apocalyptic Fall, is a constant inscribed upon us all, generation to generation.

The novel underscores this by the temporal frame stories, which repeat similar plots and thematic structures. 'The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing' begins in the mid-19th century on the Chatham Islands, east of New Zealand, at the endpoint of the invading Maori tribe's cannibalistic genocide of the native, and pacifistic, Moriori. Observed by an American notary, Adam Ewing, this literalisation of the predacity of humans over one another introduces the theme that continues throughout the text: that we will inevitably consume one another, leading to our own self destruction, both on the individual and the cultural level. While the novella has Adam Ewing saving one of the Moriori and committing himself to the abolitionist cause back in America, thereby suggesting a kind of optimistic existentialist humanism, the rest of the novel underscores the universality of that predacity. In the temporally final section, 'Sloosha's Crossin,' most of humanity has been annihilated, and the small bands of survivors left on Hawaii have returned to a state similar to the Moriori and Maori, with a tribe of pacifists called the

Valleysmen all being slaughtered or enslaved, save one, by a tribe of Maori-like cannibals called the Kona. While the last Valleysman tells his tale to a tribe on neighboring Maui, his descendants do not believe him, and nothing has been learned. The tribes on Maui await the inevitable invasion by the Kona, as the cycle to our eventual apocalypse continues all over again.

David Mitchell's novels are part of a broader trend of postmodern literature that figures the apocalypse as metaphorical Fall from a non-linguistic prelapsarian idyll to a new consciousness in a world of fragments – of language, cultural forms, and semiotic systems. In each of his first three novels, *Ghostwritten*, *Number9Dream* and *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell creates eschatological parables to critique an inherent predacity in human affairs. *Cloud Atlas* has sometimes been interpreted as attempting to undermine the fatalistically pessimistic worldview the novel had so meticulously established with the constructivist conviction that our beliefs determine our reality – that a better set of beliefs will help create a better world. The novel's temporal structure suggests, however, that nothing progresses through time, and that humanity will eventually annihilate itself because of its own inherent fracture at the beginning of life – thereby serving as a kind of Lacanian metaphor about the desire caused by our fall into language. Discussing one of the survivor's claims that 'human hunger birthed the Civ'lize, but human hunger killed it too,'²¹ Mitchell told Adam Begley: 'What made us successful in Darwinian terms – our skill at manipulating our environment – now threatens to wipe us out as a species.'²² For Mitchell's fictions, therefore, we are born with the apocalypse always already inscribed within us, yet he still holds onto a kind of hopeful pessimism, as he described to James Naughtie:

I hope that by electing the people with the most integrity and the most wisdom, they can protect us from this urge within us that makes us, as a species, so successful, but as citizens of the planet, so abhorrent. ... Probably in the long run, we're kind of doomed. All things end, and probably our civilization will. Hopefully there will be people around in the bits and pieces afterwards to pick things up and start it all over again.²³

This slight hope underscores the use of future narratives as a mode for transformation of the audience's consciousness – that through aesthetic representation of the unexperiential, we may avoid that particular timeline. In this way, Mitchell's works are part of a trend in prophetic postmodern parables, such as Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, in which the apocalypse serves as a deconstruction of contemporary mores, always with the pessimistic hope that we might change society before these things come to pass, even if it seems that Mitchell's version of our actual reality has no hopes of such a transformation.

Notes

¹ David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (New York: Random House, 2004), 453.

² As Melissa Denes frames it: 'As a child, he says, he was "very anxious". Growing up in Worcestershire with his older brother and artist parents, he worried constantly about the threat of nuclear war. "I was speaking to some Dutch friends about it recently, and they laughed and said, 'Why would you believe that?' It would make an interesting study – how much was nuclear war feared, really, in the early 1980s in different countries, and I wonder if there is a correlation between the size of a country's defence budget and that fear." He had read all of John Wyndham's "traumatic, disturbing" books by the age of 12 and thinks that this, too, fed his apocalyptic streak.' See Melissa Denes, 'Apocalypse, Maybe', *The Guardian*, 20 February 2004, 13 April 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/feb/21/fiction.davidmitchell>.

³ See Mitchell's interview with Leigh Wilson: 'An example of this is the first chapter of *Ghostwritten*, which was inspired by a real fugitive belonging to Aum Shinrikyo, the doomsday cult which perpetrated the Tokyo Gas Attack in 1995. He was holed up in Okinawa, as far away as you can get from Tokyo and still be in Japanese territory. The article haunted me – I was curious to explore what might have been going on in his mind, so I wrote the story, which is one possible version.' Leigh Wilson, 'David Mitchell', in *Writer's Talk: Conversations with Contemporary British Novelists*, eds. Philip Tew, Fiona Tolan and Leigh Wilson (London: Continuum, 2008), 95.

⁴ Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 21.

⁵ Cf. Nietzsche: 'How, on the other hand, did the Jews feel about Rome? A thousand signs tell us; but it suffices to recall the Apocalypse of John, the most wanton of all literary outburst that vengefulness has on its conscience.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 489.

⁶ In this way, Mitchell's apocalyptic vision shares more with what Elizabeth Rosen has described in *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* as the 'more ancient, cyclical versions of cosmic destruction and renewal.' Elizabeth Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), xxii.

⁷ Stanislaw Ulam, 'Tribute to John von Neumann', *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society* 64 (1958): 5.

⁸ Vernor Vinge, 'The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era', *San Diego State University*, 1993, 13 April 2013, <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/faculty/vinge/misc/singularity.html>.

⁹ David Mitchell, *Ghostwritten* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 401.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹¹ Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 160. McHale uses as his primary example the final scene in Thomas Pynchon's influential 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, which ends with a missile poised just above a movie theatre, almost about to explode, but not actually exploding in the text.

¹² Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Art in Theory: 1900-2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 527.

¹³ See Will McMorran's analysis of the relations between the works in '*Cloud Atlas* and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*: Fragmentation and Integrity in the Postmodern Novel.' Will McMorran, '*Cloud Atlas* and *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*: Fragmentation and Integrity in the Postmodern Novel', in *David Mitchell: Critical Essays*, ed. Sarah Dillon (Canterbury: Glyph Limited, 2011), 155-175.

¹⁴ Christoph Bode, 'Looking at Tomorrows (and Tomorrows and Tomorrows ...)', trans. Christoph Bode, *LMU: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitat Munchen* 1, No. 1 (2011): 1-4.

¹⁵ Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 393.

¹⁶ James Naughtie, 'David Mitchell', *Bookclub, BBC Radio 4*, 3 June 2007, 19 April 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007mdcg>.

¹⁷ Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 252.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁹ Naughtie, 'David Mitchell'.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 273.

²² Adam Begley, 'David Mitchell: The Art of Fiction No 204', *The Paris Review* 193 (Summer 2010) n.p., 13 April 2013, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6034/the-art-of-fiction-no-204-david-mitchell>.

²³ Naughtie, 'David Mitchell'.

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Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains*: The Post-Apocalyptic Function of the University

Heidi Yeandle

Abstract

An overlooked aspect of Angela Carter's post-apocalyptic novel *Heroes and Villains* (1969) is her critique of the utility of universities and academic qualifications, a commentary exacerbated by her interaction with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Carter's resistance towards university education is made explicit elsewhere in her *oeuvre*, where she attacks F. R. Leavis' elitist notion of the canon. In 'Truly, It Felt Like Year One', a retrospective account of the 1960s, Carter says that she 'was going through some kind of intellectual apprenticeship [...] and I recognised and responded to a way of interpreting the world that suited my own instincts far more than the Leavisite version I was being given at university.'¹ I argue that, written at the end of this decade, and with the context of the Cold War in mind, *Heroes and Villains* is a fictional survival guide, where Carter voices a very real concern for living in the aftermath of a nuclear war. The dystopian landscape of *Heroes and Villains* is divided into two worlds: Professors and Barbarians. Marianne, the protagonist, is a native of the Professors' community who inhabit a walled compound. Education and the preservation of pre-apocalyptic knowledge are their main concerns, but their academic expertise is depicted as useless in relation to post-apocalyptic survival, and consistently parodied. Furthermore, the Professors' population is in decline, due to high suicide rates. Contrarily, the nomadic Barbarians have adapted to post-apocalyptic surroundings, and have practical skills rather than academic erudition. But their population is also decreasing, because of a lack of medical knowledge and equipment. Carter's depiction of the two landscapes raises many questions that are relevant in relation to contemporary notions of survivalism: Are academic qualifications useful after an apocalypse? Is it better to be a Professor or a Barbarian? And, most importantly, can anyone survive? Marianne's discoveries in the world of the Barbarians provides the key to answering these questions.

Key Words: Angela Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, survivalism, university, education, Leavis, post-apocalypse, knowledge, *Gulliver's Travels*.

1. Historical Context: 'It Was Tough and Go for a Minute There'²

What is the best way to successfully *survive* an apocalypse? In order to effectively answer this, another question must be raised: How can one advantageously *prepare* for an apocalypse? I argue that Angela Carter seeks to provide answers for such questions in her speculative post-apocalyptic novel

Heroes and Villains. In this respect, I suggest that this narrative falls into Carter's definition of 'speculative fiction' which she says is 'the fiction of asking "what if?"'³ As well as asking pertinent questions related to surviving and preparing for an apocalypse after a nuclear war, my argument is that *Heroes and Villains* scrutinises the skills and knowledge needed to enhance the chances of surviving in such a climate. I particularly focus on Carter's interrogation of the function of universities and academic qualifications in this environment, and claim that her intertextual engagement with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* reinforces her critical view of academia, and the importance of having practical knowledge.

Published in 1969, *Heroes and Villains* was written in the context of critical episodes of the Cold War, such as the Vietnam War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. As Carter acknowledges, the 'late sixties' were characterised by 'living through the margin of the Vietnam War,' and her 'generation [...] grew up with the reality of nuclear weapons.'⁴ She 'was five when the Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and [...] came of age roughly with the Cuban Missile Crisis,' a confrontation she regards as 'one of the great watersheds, certainly of my life.'⁵ Carter refers to the Crisis as a time when 'it was touch and go for a minute there,'⁶ but, as Sarah Gamble argues, in *Heroes and Villains* Carter 'imaginatively explores how life would have been had the brinkmanship practiced by Russia and America in 1962 actually toppled the world over the edge into nuclear catastrophe.'⁷ The historical context of Carter's post-nuclear war novel also situates the text alongside the origins of 'survivalism,' or 'doomsday preppers.' This movement is characterised by people who prepare for disasters or emergencies, including extreme weather conditions, produce shortages, or 'expected' apocalypses, by building or utilising underground shelters and aiming for self-sufficiency in times of crisis. As Sandra J. Reinke notes, 'survivalism emerged in the United States in the 1960s as a consequence of the Cold War.'⁸ Thus, I contend that *Heroes and Villains* can be read as a survival guide, a fictional and political response to the context in which it was written, and the simultaneous rise of survivalism. The implications of Carter's manual, in light of the now increasingly mainstream activity of survivalism, have considerably relevant consequences for twenty-first century readers.

2. *What Are Universities For?*⁹

This is the title of Stefan Collini's 2012 polemic which investigates the contemporary function of Higher Education institutions. Carter is, I argue, discussing a similar problem in *Heroes and Villains*: how useful are academic qualifications in a post-apocalyptic environment? Carter's personal experience of her university education in Bristol demonstrates a damning resistance towards her English degree, a resistance predominantly targeted at F. R. Leavis's notion of the canon. Leavis established an elitist and narrow canon in his 1948 work *The Great Tradition*, primarily including George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad,¹⁰ and, in this light, Carter says that she deliberately chose to specialise in medieval

literature because it was 'a field where the Leavisites did not reach.'¹¹ She uses Leavis as a metonym for the problems she experienced in academia in terms of limitations and restrictions. Carter claims that her 'intellectual apprenticeship' in the 1960s allowed her to '[respond] to a way of interpreting the world that suited my own instincts far more than the Leavisite version I was being given at university.'¹²

Carter's mocking presentation of academia in *Heroes and Villains* comes in the form of the elitist community of Professors, whose ancestors had access to underground bunkers. As the protagonist's father, the Professor of History, tells his daughter, Marianne:

before the war, there were places called Universities where men did nothing but read books and conduct experiments. These men had certain privileges, though mostly unstated ones; but all the same, some Professors were allowed in the deep shelters with their families, during the war.¹³

Notably, the Professors are androcentric and anonymous; their identity is restricted to their academic discipline, thus allowing Carter to generalise the problems they exhibit in relation to university education. Relatives of the Professors are also unnamed and defined by their role, with the exception of Marianne, who deliberately 'trip[s] up the son of the Professor of Mathematics'¹⁴ when he proposes a game of Soldiers and Barbarians, because of his insistence that as a Soldier it is an indisputable fact that he can shoot her. Thus, as Linden Peach notes, 'Marianne disrupts the male symbolic structure.'¹⁵ I go on to argue, however, that this act is also a metaphor for the problems Marianne poses for the learned, institutionalised Professors.

The Professors encapsulate Carter's parodical portrayal of academic qualifications in post-apocalyptic circumstances, particularly Marianne's father, who has 'read more books than any other Professor in the community,'¹⁶ predominantly within the fields of philosophy, social science, and anthropology. However, Carter explicitly highlights the futility of scholarly work in the post-nuclear world they inhabit. Marianne's father, for instance, 'was writing a book on the archaeology of social theory but maybe nobody in the community would want to read it, except Marianne, and she might not understand it.'¹⁷ Likewise, saying that there *used to be* Universities signifies the irrelevance of such establishments, but the father's focus on the past – as the Professor of History – ignores this. His impending blindness, as well as the fact that after his death Marianne burns his books, adds to Carter's satirical depiction of the scholars.

3. Academic Education: 'I Am the Cleverest of All the Savages'¹⁸

In the realm of the Professors, education and the preservation of knowledge are primary concerns. Carter thus puts Marianne's education under scrutiny, enabling her to voice what *not* to do after an apocalypse. Marianne reads her father's 'library of old books' and is taught 'reading, writing and history.'¹⁹ Moreover, she is quizzed on ideas such as 'city' and 'one million,'²⁰ concepts unknown and irrelevant to her, like that of 'Universities.' For educational purposes, her father

directed her back to his books, Mumford etc, and to the dictionaries; but the dictionaries contained innumerable incomprehensible words she could only define through their use in his other books, for these words had ceased to describe facts and now stood only for ideas or memories.²¹

As Alison Lee notes, 'the art of the Professors is knowledge of the past, although what they seek to preserve is already anachronistic.'²² Collini's examination of the twenty-first century university makes a similar observation: 'in some quarters,' he claims, 'universities are heralded as engines of technological advance and economic prosperity' whilst 'elsewhere they are attacked for being "self-indulgent", "backward-looking", and "elitist."'²³ The latter category corresponds to Carter's presentation of the Professors.

Carter's parody of the Professors is exacerbated by her satirical portrayal of Donally, the renegade Professor who appoints himself as the leader of the Barbarians, the supposedly savage outsiders who invade the Professors' compound. Allegedly, Donally is an accomplished academic who *claims* to have a doctoral degree; he gives Marianne a 'white visiting card on which was beautifully engraved, in Gothic script, DR F. R. DONALLY, PH D.'²⁴ It is implied that Donally wants to use his knowledge practically, unlike the rest of the Professors. When Marianne interrogates him and asks, 'why didn't you stay where you belonged, editing texts or doing research?' he responds, 'I wanted to see the world.'²⁵ In order to put his theoretical knowledge into practice, Donally relocates to the wilderness – with his books – and intends to use the post-apocalyptic circumstances to rebuild society. However, the Professors' qualifications and Donally's Ph.D. have no status or meaning post-war, indicating Carter's discussion about the value of an academic education. The fact that Donally's initials are F. R. is significant, hinting this could be a contribution to her attack on Leavis.

Donally takes on the self-appointed role of tutor to Jewel, the Barbarian who 'rescues' Marianne from the Professors. But, whilst being literate and literary are key benchmarks of intelligence in the realm of the Professors, the opposite is true of the Barbarians, as Donally ensures that his pupil remains illiterate. The rational for this is both 'self-defence' – Donally does not want competition – and to 'keep him beautifully savage.'²⁶ Marianne, however, is brought up believing that the

Barbarians are uneducated, but her firsthand experience with Jewel challenges the reliability of such knowledge. For instance, he uses the scientific term for the adder that bites her, '*Viperus berus*,' leaving her in a state of disbelief that 'she had heard him give the snake its zoological name.'²⁷

Carter's reading of *Gulliver's Travels* adds to her critique of the Professors' education. In *Heroes and Villains*, Carter explicitly references the relevance of this classic text; towards the end of the narrative, for instance, Marianne tells Jewel that 'the Barbarians are Yahoos but the Professors are Laputans.'²⁸ As Lemuel Gulliver observes in relation to the scholarly Laputans:

although they are dexterous enough upon a piece of paper in the management of the rule, the pencil and the divider, yet in the common actions and behaviour of life, I have not seen a more clumsy, awkward, and unhandy people.²⁹

For the Laputans, those who are less gifted at mathematics and music are ignorant and inferior, and are subsequently disregarded.

The Yahoos, on the other hand, are primitive humanlike animals who are seen to be incapable of reason and government. By aligning the Barbarians with the Yahoos, Carter parodies the Professors' knowledge but also indicates that Jewel has not 'been educated according to their [the Professors/Laputans] requirements'; he has received an 'excellent though unorthodox education.'³⁰ The high regard for history and literacy in the Professors' compound results in Jewel's knowledge being seen as subordinate, as his education lacks these components. Instead he has been taught 'caution. And genetics, metaphysics, some conjuring tricks and a few quotations from old books in dead languages' – a similarly pointless syllabus *vis-à-vis* the Barbarians' survival.³¹

4. Practical Skills: 'No Wonder They Had to Put the Professors in Shelters, When They Can't Even Find Their Way through a Wood'³²

If Carter's survival guide implies, in relation to the Professors, that academic qualifications are obsolete after an apocalypse, then her presentation of the nomadic Barbarians allows her to discuss the benefits of practical skills. While the Barbarians can navigate their hostile surroundings, Marianne, a Professor's daughter, becomes disoriented and has hallucinations beyond the security of the enclave. As Lee notes, 'the Professors' knowledge is [sic] inured against any change that might come from interaction with the present.'³³ Although the Professors are not preparing for a disaster, their resistance to new, practical knowledge is curbing the continuation of their community long-term. As Carter told Lisa Appignanesi, the 'people who are sitting there in their bunkers, are the ones whose imaginations are too impoverished to imagine what the world is going to be like afterwards.'³⁴

Bernie Carr's *The Prepper's Pocket Guide: 101 Easy Things you can do to Ready your Home for a Disaster* (2011) similarly highlights the need to adjust to the post-disaster landscape, while warning that there is a 'sheer amount of information [...] to learn.'³⁵ Carr encourages the potential doomsday prepper to 'learn new survival skills to become more self-sufficient.'³⁶ The Professors, however, have committed one of the 'common preparedness mistakes' – 'not acquiring skills.'³⁷ They fail to recognise that the outsiders have adapted to the post-apocalyptic landscape and are acclimatising to the new living conditions. As Marianne's father states:

their grandfathers survived outside the shelters, somehow; they survived at first by accident and continue to survive only by tenacity. They hunt, maraud and prey on us for the things they need and can't make themselves and never realize we are necessary to them. When they finally destroy us, if they finally destroy us, they'll destroy their own means of living so I do not think they will destroy us.³⁸

Nevertheless, the fact that the Professors are self-sufficient encourages the Barbarians to invade and parasitically take advantage of their produce. This allows them to focus on other aspects of survival, depicting the disadvantage of following Carr's 'prepping' advice and striving for self-sufficiency. While Donally is encouraging the Barbarians to 'settle and plant gardens',³⁹ Marianne takes over as tribal leader following Donally's departure and supposed death, and Carter's ambiguous conclusion leaves details of the Barbarians' future unspecified. Thus, Carter does not provide a finite answer as to whether agricultural knowledge is useful in the post-nuclear war world.

Carter's discussion of what skills and knowledge are beneficial after an apocalypse is aided by Collini's examination of 'the history of debates about the values and purposes of universities' and his declaration that 'these debates fall into a particularly dispiriting pattern, which might be parodied as the conflict between the "useful" and the "useless."'⁴⁰ He demonstrates that:

it is not the subject-matter itself that determines whether something is, at a particular moment, classed as "useful" or "useless" [...] Rather, it is a question of whether enquiry into that subject is being undertaken under the sign of limitlessness – that is to say, not just, as with the development of all knowledge, subject to the testing of hypotheses or the revision of errors, but where the open-ended quest for understanding has primacy over any application or intermediate outcome.⁴¹

This highlights the relevance of Carter's thinking to contemporary culture. The Professors' knowledge is 'useful' *vis-à-vis* Collini's definition, but quickly becomes 'useless' when a fight for survival, which requires applicable knowledge, is at stake. Thus, Carter's parody of the Professors' endeavour to cling on to useless academic knowledge and her portrayal of the more practical skills of the Barbarians demonstrates the basic need to survive. The Professors are too dependent on literature and academic knowledge, and lack the practical skills needed to prosper in the current landscape.

5. Medical Knowledge: 'The Children Suffered Promiscuously from Ringworm, Skin Diseases and Weeping Eye. Also Rickets'⁴²

As part of his prepping advice, Carr sensibly states that 'a first aid kit is essential.'⁴³ Likewise, in *Heroes and Villains* medical knowledge is a fundamental component of survival, but, I argue, Carter's depiction of this skill demonstrates the need for a complementary blend of both theoretical and practical expertise. An abstract understanding of physiology and causal relations is imperative within the Professors' enclave. When Marianne's pet rabbit dies, for instance, an autopsy is carried out straight away: they are 'a community so rational that [...] they cut it open to find out why.'⁴⁴ Carter ridicules such behaviour, as the academic understanding gained from the autopsy is not used to boost the Professors' population or to help the survival of others. Their population is in decline because of high suicide rates, but they export their 'agricultural surplus in return for drugs and other medical supplies.'⁴⁵ As Lee notes, 'the intellectual elite are a dying breed, and their knowledge, because it cannot be disseminated in the larger world, will die with them.'⁴⁶

The Barbarian population is similarly in decline due to high infant mortality rates, with many of the children suffering from conditions such as ringworm or rickets. In opposition to the Professors, the Barbarians lack biological training and equipment, as well as medication. They do have primitive yet effective remedies for some ailments, such as snakebite. When Marianne gets bitten, Jewel 'took his sharp knife and cut the wound then put his mouth against it, sucked out the poison, spat and continued to suck.'⁴⁷ However, they are desperately in need of cures for diseases such as gangrene, for which they do not have an antidote. After kidnapping/rescuing Marianne, it does not take long for Jewel to ask her, 'did they ever teach you medicine?',⁴⁸ highlighting the importance of such knowledge for the outsiders. Marianne tells Jewel that she has no medical knowledge as her education is restricted to subjects in the arts and humanities. Jewel's response signifies that such knowledge is no longer useful; 'that won't help my brother, then, who's ill [with gangrene].'⁴⁹ Thus, Marianne's education has no function beyond the world of the Professors/Laputans, although it does not have a use in her home territory, either. Only useful knowledge is appreciated in the Barbarian landscape. This is reinforced when Marianne informs Jewel that her father's

function is thinking, and he derogatorily asks if her father was 'a preserved brain.'⁵⁰

6. Conclusion

While Carter implies that the Barbarians' primitive methods of healthcare need to combine with the Professors' knowledge and equipment in order for the two societies to survive and rebuild, the ambiguous conclusion does not suggest – in relation to education, knowledge, and skills – that a profitable blend of Professors and Barbarians can be achieved. With Marianne, a *Professor's daughter*, uneducated in the field of medicine, left as the leader of the Barbarians, it seems that the Barbarians will merely carry on as they did under Donally's monarchy. In relation to the questions that I opened with, I would argue that Carter's speculative answers have implications for contemporary survivalists and doomsday preppers. Carter's novel suggests that academic qualifications are mostly redundant after an apocalypse, and that adapting practically to new conditions is a priority. The exception is that a theoretical understanding of biology is useful if used practically, something that cannot be said for the Professors. Thus, in line with Carr's *The Prepper's Pocket Guide*, Carter highlights the importance of both practical survival skills and access to medical supplies and training, a combination that neither the Professors nor Barbarians exemplify. Collini's argument that a characteristic of modern universities is 'that it furthers some form of advanced scholarship or research whose character is not wholly dictated by the need to solve immediate practical problems,'⁵¹ is therefore problematic in a post-apocalyptic context, in which, Carter suggests, applicable survival skills rather than scholarly knowledge have a function. Thus, in *Heroes and Villains*, Carter debates the utility of an academic education in the context of the Cold War, and concludes that practicality is key. As an erudite writer herself, whose expertise and interests mirror that of the Professors, this is an ironic standpoint for Carter, suggesting that she is reflecting on her chances of post-apocalyptic survival.

Notes

¹ Angela Carter, 'Truly, It Felt Like Year One', in *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the 1960s*, ed. Sara Maitland (London: Virago Press, 1988), 211.

² Angela Carter, 'Fools Are My Theme, Let Satire Be My Song', in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Writings*, ed. Jenny Uglow (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998), 34.

³ Angela Carter, interview with Anna Katsavos, 'An Interview with Angela Carter', *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 14, No. 3 (1994): 11.

⁴ Carter, 'Fools Are My Theme', 34.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sarah Gamble, *Angela Carter: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 86.

⁸ Saundra J. Reinke, 'Survivalism', in *Guns in American Society: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, Culture, and the Law*, 1, 2nd Edition, ed. Gregg Lee Carter, (California: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 797, accessed 1 April 2013, http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=oD46JBOhMU0C&pg=PA797&dq=survivalism+1960s&hl=en&sa=X&ei=eNZZUaqaHfLy0gWDqoGYCA&redir_esc=yv=onepage&q=survivalism%201960s&f=false.

⁹ Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

¹⁰ See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011).

¹¹ Angela Carter, interview with Ian McEwan, 'Sweet Smell of Excess', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 9 September 1984, 43.

¹² Carter, 'Truly', 211.

¹³ Carter, *Heroes and Villains* (London: Picador, 1972), 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Linden Peach, *Angela Carter*, 2nd Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 79.

¹⁶ Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alison Lee, *Angela Carter* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 54.

²³ Collini, *What Are Universities For?*, 3.

²⁴ Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 50.

²⁵ Ibid., 62.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁸ Ibid., 123.

²⁹ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2010), 181.

³⁰ Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 123.

³¹ Ibid., 125.

³² Ibid., 25.

³³ Lee, *Angela Carter*, 54.

³⁴ Angela Carter, interview with Lisa Appignanesi, 'Angela Carter in Conversation' (London: ICA Video, 1987).

³⁵ Bernie Carr, *The Prepper's Pocket Guide: 101 Easy Things You Can Do to Ready Your Home for a Disaster* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2011), 17, accessed 7 April 2013,

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uakgkrvEN4sC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0 - v=onepage&q&f=false.

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

³⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

³⁸ Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 11.

³⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁰ Collini, *What Are Universities For?*, 39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 55.

⁴² Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 45.

⁴³ Carr, *The Prepper's Pocket Guide*, 27.

⁴⁴ Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 77.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁶ Lee, *Angela Carter*, 54.

⁴⁷ Carter, *Heroes and Villains*, 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁵¹ Collini, *What Are Universities For?*, 7.

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Post-Apocalyptic Identity: Alderney in the Spotlight

Sheila C. Bibb

Abstract

In the run-up to the winter solstice of 2012, much was made of the alleged Mayan prophecy of the end of the world. However, for many societies this phenomenon, an Apocalypse, is not a dubious prophecy but a literal event which descended upon their community – frequently with little or no warning – and changed forever their world and their identity. One such community exists on the tiny Channel Island of Alderney. The German Occupation of this island during WWII was swift, thorough and destructive. The population was displaced, disregarded and scattered abroad. Five years later, with liberation, came a return to the island and a rebuilding of a once prosperous and proud community. In this chapter I examine more closely the pre-Apocalyptic society, its markers of identity and its social and moral values, and contrast these with the post-Apocalyptic society found there today. I investigate evidence of Bourdieu's ideas of habitus as reflected in the changes which have occurred, and the tools used to create the current Alderney. In doing so I show both positive and negative aspects of an Apocalypse.

Key Words: Alderney, German occupation, displacement, identity, habitus.

1. Introductory Thoughts

We knew something was going to happen. We all went down to the Buttes¹ and were told to go home, pack a suitcase and be ready to leave if the authorities thought it was necessary to evacuate. They told us the church bells would not ring again until the boats were on their way. At 5.30 am the next day, the church bells started ringing and the boats were already there.²

This excerpt from an Alderney resident describing her memories of WWII introduced me to a personal encounter with the nightmare scenario of being suddenly removed from a familiar life, placed in a totally alien situation for an extended period of time, and then returning to find the family home and all the surrounding area destroyed. As she told of her experiences the picture she painted reflected a form of Apocalypse. In this chapter I consider this community which, seventy-three years ago, were faced with a very real and truly apocalyptic event as their lives and homes were completely changed by war. For those on Alderney, a small island lying off the coast of Normandy, France, the occupation of the island by the Germans during WWII was swift, thorough, and destructive. The population was almost entirely displaced and scattered throughout the mainland UK for five long years. When liberation came, there was no quick return and warm welcome. Instead it was a slow painful process of rebuilding, of supporting each other and of

creating a new world to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of destruction. In this chapter, I argue that an Apocalypse, while inherently destructive, may in fact be an ultimate force for the revelation of hidden strengths, for development and the consolidation of identity, particularly when viewed in accordance with Bourdieu's ideas on habitus. I ask whether this Apocalypse truly destroyed a society and a way of life, or did it, in the true meaning of Apocalypse, reveal the hidden depths and characteristics of an island people?

2. Alderney: Pre-Apocalypse

It should be noted that this island lies approximately seven miles from the French coast and has been inhabited since Neolithic times. As a result of its location Alderney has historically been linked with France, particularly the Duchy of Normandy. Following the Norman invasion of England in 1066 came a link to England and when, in 1204, King John of England lost Normandy to King Philip of France, the Channel Islands,³ of which Alderney is part, chose to remain British and continue to this day as British Crown Dependencies. Their history from that point onwards became closely linked with the fortunes of Britain. The only 'relic' of Alderney's French past was the use of Auregnais – a form of Old Norman French.

From then on location continues to play a major part in Alderney's development, history and identity. While the Channel Islands generally lie within the Bay of St. Malo in a fairly sheltered position, Alderney is just outside the Bay in the Atlantic Ocean and at the mouth of the English Channel. This has many implications for its development. Weather conditions are harsher and it is more likely to be cut-off from the world by weather than are the other islands. It is also a strategic place from which to watch, and if necessary intercept, shipping entering or leaving the English Channel. This is one reason why the British added 13 fortifications during Victorian times to protect against possible invasion by the French. They also started construction of an enormous breakwater designed to house and protect the entire British fleet. This was a heyday for Alderney – the population grew to about 7,000 and the rhythmic routine of agricultural and seafaring life was stirred by the construction work and garrisoning of many troops. In reality, despite all the preparation, the forts and breakwater were never to see 'active duty' because Britain and France joined forces in the Crimean War and all thoughts of hostilities disappeared. Nonetheless, Alderney was greatly changed by this time.

Today the forts still remain – most in use in some way. The breakwater, though never finished to the full original design is still an impressive and much used facility. The population too has been influenced by these activities. In pre-WWII Alderney, the families who inhabited the island were a mixture. Some traced their roots back over the centuries; the farmers and fishermen, the artisans and seamen who had made a living and survived for generations in a wild, beautiful but not

always hospitable terrain. Farming was carried out using individual strips of land, with each producer supplying his own family and then selling off any surplus produce. As on the other islands, granite was plentiful and was quarried for construction both locally and elsewhere. Additionally there were newcomers, those whose families came during the great Victorian construction period and stayed on. In all cases they were a practical people, used to periods of hardship, reliant on themselves and their ability to provide for their families.

It is against this background that we see how Bourdieu's theory of habitus, which states that the interplay between accepted norms and tendencies present in a society and the agency of those within this society creates and legitimises their behaviour and thought,⁴ describes and explains the characteristics of that pre-WWII population. What differentiates habitus from similar notions is that Bourdieu sees it as becoming embodied, so much part of the individual that they appear not to have control over it as it governs actions and thought. It is therefore the effect of changes in habitus which I consider more closely in this chapter, particularly the changes wrought as the events of 1939 unfolded and war in Europe moved ever closer and brought about the Apocalyptic destruction of Alderney.

3. Alderney: World War II

Again it is essential to give some historical background to understand why the Occupation occurred. When WWII broke out the Channel Islands were seen as both strategically important and also vulnerable. Under various treaties dating back to 1205 the Islands looked to the British Parliament for defence. From the German point of view, these Islands were British territory and taking them would be a strategic part of any invasion of Britain and would form an ideal platform from which to carry out such an offensive. Suddenly these small islands became a major part of the conflict. With little time to assess the position, Britain consulted with the leaders of Jersey and Guernsey and agreed that it would be better to withdraw all troops thereby demilitarising the islands. In this way, the islands would no longer pose a threat to Germany, and the troops stationed there would be released to fight elsewhere. All agreed to this and boats were sent to collect any of the local population who wished to leave, particularly women and children. Within three days almost half the population of Guernsey, together with many from Jersey left. On Alderney, there was little consultation at a government level but the island leader, Judge French, contacted London directly and asked for boats to come and pick up the entire population if it was considered necessary. The boats arrived in Alderney on 23 June. For those people there was no discussion, just a few hours to prepare. It is believed that all except 6 people evacuated, those remaining staying to allegedly look after the cattle. Others just shut their doors and left. There was no preparation; indeed when a group arrived from Guernsey a few days later to rescue the animals which had been abandoned they found half-eaten meals on tables and

many pets killed before their owners left. Other pets and farm animals were just turned loose to fend for themselves.⁵

The German invasion was swift and complete. On the other islands those who remained learned to live under German authority, virtual prisoners in their own homes, yet able to carry on some semblance of normal life. On Alderney the Germans took over the whole island, installing themselves in buildings and homes, using abandoned furniture and goods, as well as seeking to reinforce the fortifications so that they too could take advantage of Alderney's strategic location. Labour camps were set up to house slave workers taken from Eastern Europe.

The picture which emerges of Alderney at this time is one of waste and desolation, a veritable Apocalyptic wasteland as places and people are destroyed. For those enslaved, conditions are horrendous. For those evacuated, lives are changed as they are forced to live in unfamiliar surroundings, among people whose language and social norms differ from theirs. Their concept of who they are is challenged and those subconscious values which define them are altered. While this amending of values is not unusual, the issue here is that this population, unlike those on the other Channel Islands, had no choice. These changes were forced upon them.

4. Alderney: Post-Apocalypse

On 9 May, 1945 the main Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey were liberated by British troops. This was followed a day later by the liberation of Sark and then the reclaiming of Alderney. In contrast to the other islands, conditions on Alderney were dire. Not only had the homes and buildings been commandeered and altered to suit German needs, but there were many other physical changes which impacted any possible return. Perhaps most damaging were the mines which had been placed around the island – believed to be some 30,000⁶ in total. The farmland, quite apart from the mines, was overgrown and unproductive with barbed wire and trenches running across it. The fortifications from previous eras still stood, but in many instances they were augmented by German additions – of 3 metre thick concrete. St. Anne's Church was now a storehouse. Other churches were damaged with holes in roofs, pews and chairs missing, windows smashed.

As far as the homes were concerned, Packe and Dreyfus record various, opposing commentaries on this.⁷ Meanwhile Judge French summed it up thus:

The first impression was of damage, destruction, devastation of everything the islanders held dear. Houses were broken and ruined, streets were full of indescribable dirt and rubble; weeds everywhere. It was not a happy homecoming. In the face of such conditions, the re-population of Alderney was by no means a foregone conclusion. The question of abandonment was seriously

discussed, for the task appeared, as well it might, almost hopeless.⁸

The homeland beloved of the islanders just five years earlier had been changed to the point where return might not be possible. Not only was much of the once fertile land now overgrown, other areas had been built over and boundary stones removed or broken. There was no way that the islanders could return at this point. Instead a plan was enacted which saw the German prisoners-of-war put to work in clearing the mines and some of the buildings. British government workers were sent to restore some 300 houses to a habitable condition and land was cleared to make way for a communal farm which would provide food for those returning. It was not until Dec 2, 1945 that the first families were able to return with a phased repatriation of remaining islanders over the next 6 months.⁹

Despite the planning, things did not go smoothly and for some time the islanders were very dependent on outside sources of help – particularly the British Government which provided building materials, furniture, clothing, seeds and other basic necessities. Many were housed in transit hotels and everyone ate communally for the gas which had provided a means of cooking in pre-war days was no longer available, replaced by electricity but not yet connected to individual homes. On a more positive note, whereas in pre-war days there was little in the way of piped water or sanitation, the Germans had installed a major water line, together with sewage pipes and electricity. But, as one islander commented, ‘... every pothole is just where it was in 1939!’¹⁰

5. Resolutions, Significance and Concluding Thoughts

I have given a lot of background detail setting out historical and geographical facts surrounding this apocalyptic event in order to show how the island, and the buildings, were changed physically and how this impacted on those returning. An example of this is the replacing of the individual strip farming method by one large communal farm. While this might seem a minor thing the fact is that with boundary markers gone and responsibility for providing for their own families similarly removed, men lost interest in producing food, although some sought to establish a right to land based on their remembrance of previous ownership. In 2013 there is still only one farm on the island producing food and this inevitably means that much is imported from the other sources. As this inability to be self-sufficient – a stark contrast to the pre-WWII state – became the accepted norm, skills and knowledge were lost. Also, because no one other than the state had any claim to land, ownership became an issue. Today there is no law of trespass – the concept of private property does not exist; paths lead through someone’s garden and the public are fully entitled to walk on those paths.

Apart from those changes mentioned there are the physical reminders of the Occupation – the bunkers, the towers, the gun emplacements. Destroying them is

virtually impossible and so they remain – some ignored, some utilised by the young for ‘bunker parties,’ others used as sheds and storage facilities. The water pipes installed by the Germans are currently being replaced with modern pipes; electricity is still the only source of heating, lighting and cooking. The destroyed houses have either been rebuilt or replaced. Employment is based on service industries, on some tourism, and a large percentage of the population is retired. Today the population still numbers just under 2000 but the composition of that population has changed considerably. There are the ‘locals’ – those whose families were on Alderney before WWII and who returned, and then there are the ‘incomers’ – anyone whose family established themselves on Alderney in the last 65 years. These factions co-exist and there is a strong bond between them but it is based on two very different ideals.

For the locals there is a degree of stubbornness and determination – qualities very much associated with the Channel Islands – which sees them working to ensure that Alderney survives and remains the island their forebears knew and developed.¹¹ There is also a change in attitude, a loss of old skills and the acquiring of new ones. For them the Apocalypse has triggered a need to restore the island to the old ways as they seek to rediscover the former values and traditions. Referencing Bourdieu, we see that for this group their *habitus* has undergone forced changes as a result of the evacuation and literal destruction of their society but they seek to modify the impact of this by retaining former norms and behaviour patterns as far as possible. In a similar way for the incomers, the island provides an opportunity to step back in time. It offers peace and security, a haven from the stresses of the world and a simplicity which has a universal appeal. For this group too there is an opportunity to redefine their personal *habitus* and to bring about a change in the way they perceive their own identity.¹² For them this change is a conscious choice. Common factors for both are the idea of the traditional way of life, of community and of voluntary work. The many retirees enable the island to function as they offer their skills and expertise in many areas – whether at the Museum, the library, the wildlife Trust, or coaching sports and other leisure activities. The most popular shop on the island is the charity shop which is always well stocked and reasonably priced. Thrift is the order of the day and an obvious relic of the post-war austerity. Auregnais is no longer spoken and many of the ‘locals’ have quite distinctive accents reflecting either northern England or Scotland – again as a result of the evacuation to these areas.

A form of Apocalypse struck this island and from it has emerged a new society; one which doggedly tries to hold on to its former self and which has nonetheless been reinvented in a modern guise. There is a reluctance to let go of the past – earlier eras are admired, acknowledged, lauded and the subjects of on-going development and excavation, but the German era is ignored. The gates to the concentration camp stand, lone monuments to a previous evil chapter in the island history with nothing but a small plaque to establish what these gates once guarded.

In the cemetery is a single monument to the Germans who died there. At one end of the island is a memorial commemorating the many European slave workers who died on Alderney during WWII. The unspoken approach to this time seems to be to ignore what happened and carry on.

There are lessons to be learned from this experience. Pre-Apocalypse, there was a thriving, independent and self-sufficient society. Post-Apocalypse, there is a shrinking, dependent society with little clear motivation except to survive at all costs. Despite the negative connotations, there are many positives arising from this opportunity to rebuild a society – the determination and commitment of the people themselves; the modernization of services such as water, sanitation and electricity; the new blood from incomers together with their skills and expertise; the new bonds forged between the locals and the incomers, and the general consensus that living on Alderney is ‘paradise.’ There is not room here to go into greater detail on the behaviour and power structures which are evident among this society. Suffice it to say that while the evacuation underpins most of the thoughts and actions of the society it is rarely given as a reason and almost never brought into a conversation unless by a researcher such as myself. So an event which is Apocalyptic in its effects may strike a society and cause devastation and a total interruption of a way of life, but it may also bring about changes and rebuilding, growth and determination. Alderney is an excellent example of this.

Notes

¹ A large open area of ground overlooking St. Anne’s harbour, Alderney.

² Marge, Sheila Bibb fieldnotes, 2013 (Unpublished).

³ An archipelago of which the main islands are Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark and Herm.

⁴ Louis Wacquant, *Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 316.

⁵ Michael Packe and Maurice Dreyfus, *The Alderney Story, 1939-1949* (Guernsey: Guernsey Press, 1971), 27.

⁶ This number is commonly given by local people.

⁷ Packe and Dreyfus, *The Alderney Story, 1939-1949*, 80-87.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹ *Ibid.* 80-85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹¹ Conversations with Alderney residents. Bibb fieldnotes, 2013. (Unpublished.)

¹² *Ibid.*

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A CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE APOCALYPSE

Doomsday did not happen! We successfully survived December 21 2012!

However, our fascination with the apocalypse has not vanished with the end of the Mayan calendar. Why does the idea of the end of the world continue to be revisited, and why is this topic currently a cultural phenomenon? And how does the portrayal of apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic scenarios reflect contemporary society and prevalent fears about the state of our planet?

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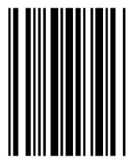


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